OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro GAMER

AMSTRAD | COMMODORE | SEGA | NINTENDO | ATARI | SINCLAIR | NEO GEO | SONY | COIN-OP | MOBILE

KNIGHT LORE

A 30-YEAR LEGACY

- KEY DEVELOPERS EXPLAIN THE IMPORTANCE OF ULTIMATE'S GROUNDBREAKING GAME
- HOW IT CHANGED ISOMETRIC GAMES FOREVER



25 GAME BOY CLASSICS
AS NINTENDO'S HANDHELD TURNS 25, WE REVISIT ITS GREATEST GAMES

THE STORY OF STRIDER
DEVELOPERS REVEAL THE SECRETS BEHIND CAPCOM'S CULT FRANCHISE

DAY 126

"THEY TOOK ME OUT FOR A CHINESE"
PETE COOKE ON CELEBRATING THE SUCCESS OF HIS 8-BIT SCI-FI MASTERPIECE TAU CETI

LUCASFILM'S FIRST GAME!
HOW BALLBLAZER HELPED CREATE A VIDEOGAME EMPIRE

ip IMAGINE PUBLISHING
Digital Edition
GreatDigitalMags.com
ISSUE 126

THE RETROBATES

FAVOURITE GAME BOY GAME



DARRAN JONES

Revenge Of The 'Gator. I'm a sucker for pinball games and this delightful effort from HAL Laboratory is one of my absolute favourites.

Expertise:
Juggling a beautiful wife, two gorgeous girls and an award-winning magazine

Currently playing:
OlliOlli

Favourite game of all time:
Strider



NICK THORPE

Pokémon Blue devoured my time as a kid – the multiplayer kept me going long after the main quest was finished.

Expertise:
Owning seven Master Systems

Currently playing:
WipEout 2048

Favourite game of all time:
Sonic The Hedgehog



PAUL DRURY

Unquestionably *Pokémon Red*. I spent 101 hours filling my Pokedex. Even my wife going into labour didn't stop me craftily continuing my quest in the delivery room...

Expertise:
The *Super Pipeline 2* source code

Currently playing:
TxK

Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



STEVE HOLMES

Pokémon Blue. Like so many others, I also grew up on the mean streets of Kanto. Misguided youth.

Expertise:
Being a word ninja

Currently playing:
Castlevania: Lords Of Shadow 2

Favourite game of all time:
The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time



JONATHAN WELLS

Have to say *Pokémon Blue*, many hours spent and enjoyed with friends back in the day.

Expertise:
Tackling dirty nappies and retro spreads

Currently playing:
Lego Marvel Super Heroes

Favourite game of all time:
The Secret Of Monkey Island



DAVID CROOKES

Tetris. It may sound an obvious, dull choice but it was the Game Boy's killer app for a reason.

Expertise:
All things Amstrad CPC, *Dizzy* and Atari Lynx

Currently playing:
Broken Sword 5: The Serpent's Curse

Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword



MARTYN CARROLL

Has to be *Super Mario Land*. Perhaps the perfect platformer and I still whizz through it regularly on the 3DS.

Expertise:
Sinclair stuff

Currently playing:
The Last of Us

Favourite game of all time:
Jet Set Willy



PAUL DAVIES

It has to be Capcom's *Mega Man 2*.

Expertise:
Banging my head against a brick wall

Currently playing:
Grand Theft Auto V

Favourite game of all time:
Ghouls 'N Ghosts

LOADING...



It's amazing to think that *Knight Lore* is 30 years old this year. It's equally amazing that I can still remember the first time I played it. I was a big fan of *Sabre Wulf* and Ultimate games in general and was eagerly awaiting Ultimate's next big release like everyone else. I fervently poured over screenshots, read the glowing reviews, but even all the heaped praise *Knight Lore* was receiving at the time couldn't prepare me for just how gob-smacking it actually was.

It seems silly now but *Knight Lore* really did feel like the future of gaming when I witnessed it in 1984. Granted, I'd already played the likes of *Marble Madness* and the highly immersive 3D *Ant Attack*, but Ultimate's game appeared to be on another level. As our feature reveals, I wasn't the only person to be impressed by Ultimate's game, and its impact cannot be underestimated.

Short of an actual making of with the Stamper brothers I'd imagine it will be some time before we visit *Knight Lore* again. The same can be said for our amazingly in-depth *Strider* history this month. There's plenty more games and franchises to cover going forward, but it would be a real shame for us to ignore such important milestones.

Enjoy the magazine,



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>> Load 126 Breathing new life into classic games

FEATURED



KNIGHT LORE

RETRO REVIVALS

In the hot seat this month…





"Deftly combining artistry with the art of war" Nick Thorpe



retroradar

GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD



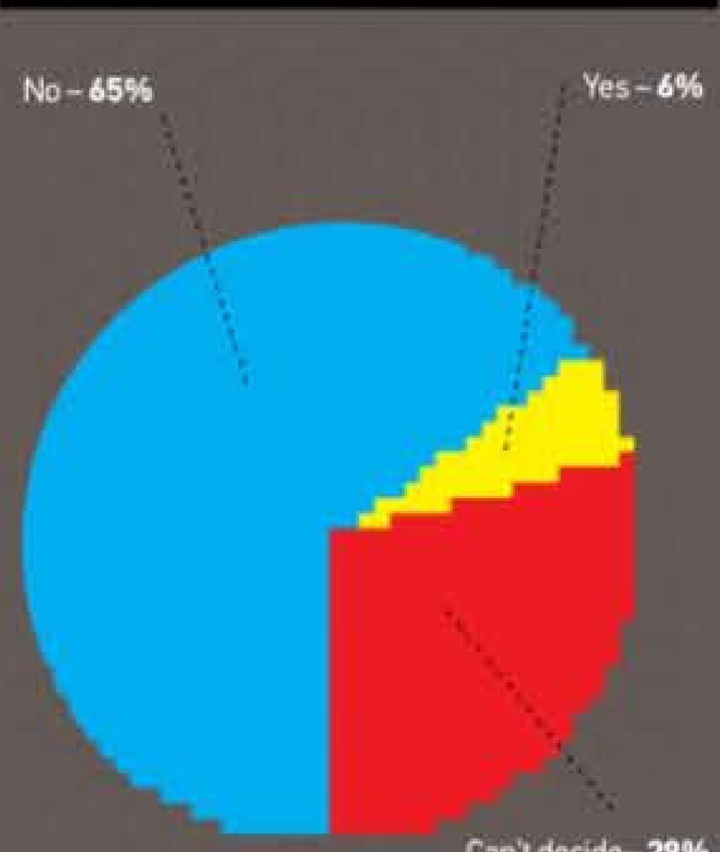
>> It's a maelstrom this month, as we investigate the recent fallout surrounding Elite's Bluetooth Spectrum Kickstarter. There's also the chance to win a cool prize by entering our new survey.

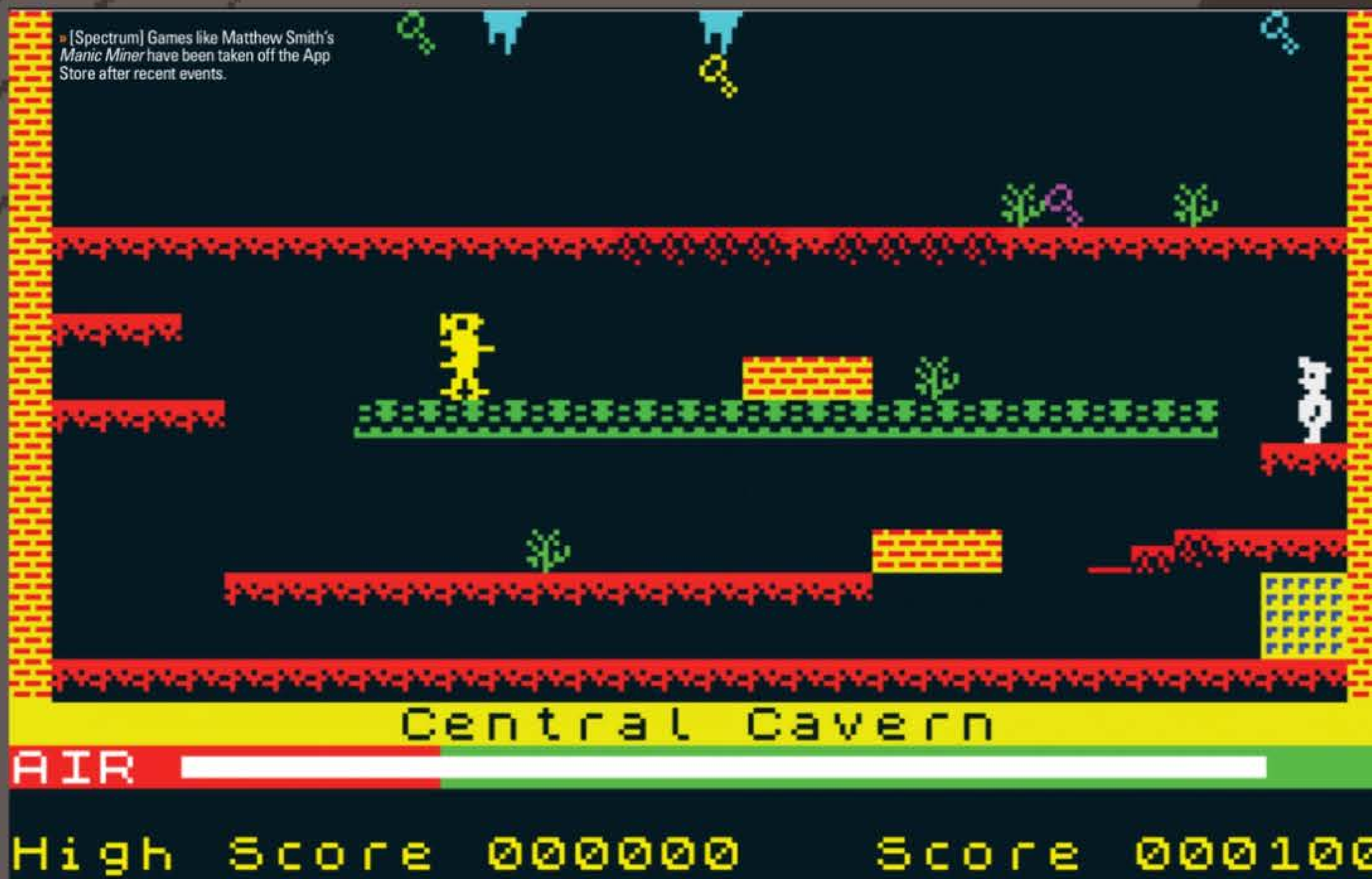
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THE RETRO DEBATE

>> Will you buy Elite products in the future?

VISIT **RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM** TO HAVE YOUR SAY





» [Spectrum] Games like Matthew Smith's *Manic Miner* have been taken off the App Store after recent events.

ELITE'S KICKSTARTER FALLOUT

SPECTRUM DEVELOPERS ENRAGED OVER LACK OF iOS PAYMENTS

Last month we ran an interview with Steve Wilcox about Elite's new Spectrum Bluetooth Kickstarter project, which had generated lots of interest within the Spectrum community. Sadly, after we went to press, things began to turn ugly…

With just a few days to go, several notable Spectrum developers began to reveal that, despite agreements that were set up with Elite in 2010, they still weren't receiving royalties for their published games. Some developers like Stephen Crow didn't even have agreements in place, meaning their games were being sold without permission.

One such person is Cronosoft's Simon Ullyatt who signed a contract with Elite Systems in 2010 that allowed Elite to release games by developers Jonathan Cauldwell and Bob Smith on Elite's Spectrum app, the same app which the Bluetooth Spectrum is due to work with. "In the first two quarters of 2011, we did have sales reports (albeit no payment to go with them)," he reveals. "I initially assumed that payment would arrive eventually. However, later on, we were getting concerned and sent a few messages to Elite. We were fobbed off with excuses such as 'the sales generated weren't as high as other more famous titles', and we should outline concerns to them. Of course, we had no idea (and still have no idea) how many copies have sold."

Ullyatt wasn't the only person being left in the dark. Legendary Spectrum coder Costa Panayi gave us an emphatic "no" when we asked him if he knew how well his games were selling, while Julian Gollop, Stephen Crow, Jon Ritman and Steve Wetherill all gave similar answers. Panayi, who, along with *Dynamite Dan* creator Rod Bowkett, has been instrumental in making people aware of what was happening, went on to tell us the following. "When the first payment didn't arrive as promised I tried ringing – no answer. Emailed – they promised



» [Spectrum] Unlike some Spectrum coders, Stephen Crow tells us that there wasn't an agreement in place with Elite for his games.

to look into it, then nothing. In 2013 I contacted Wilcox again through a solicitor but again no progress."

Stephen Crow was told he'd receive a licence/distribution agreement from Elite in December 2010 but it never arrived. His games have nonetheless been on sale. "I think when a business like Elite Systems is selling my games without my permission and making a considerable amount of money (if you factor in all the unpaid developers) then this is outrageous," he angrily tells us. "They are profiting off of other peoples' work and getting away with it. Back in the ZX Spectrum days there was definitely game piracy where people would copy games for their friends, but this was small scale and no one was really making money."

As the Kickstarter drew to a close Wilcox released a statement – which is located in the comments section and not on the more noticeable updates section – stating Elite's intentions in light of the Kickstarter reaching its goal. "We wish to assure all of the appeal's backers, including the game developers that have posted, that having been in business for 30 years we take our contractual relationships most seriously. We urge the game developers to set out any issues which they wish to be addressed in writing and send them to us directly." A new email address was then provided, but the group of unpaid developers, which had grown to 13, was not happy with his reply.

"We are so enraged by Mr Wilcox's 'statement' that we have one of our own," began Rod Bowkett's response. "Given what we've been telling you over the last few days can you imagine how offensive we find 'we take our contractual relationships most seriously'. Frankly anyone who buys that deserves to lose their money. We ask you to not purchase any Elite product that either includes any of our games or supports IAPs of them. Mr Wilcox has no rights to them because he has repeatedly failed to honour the terms of the agreements with us and is in breach of copyright. In the case of Stephen Crow he never even had an agreement in the first place. In a court of law he wouldn't have a leg to stand on and he knows it. Do [you] honestly think he's going to suddenly change his modus operandi when it comes to this project? Good luck with that!"

Although a big crusade began on Twitter, World Of Spectrum and other websites resulting in aware backers changing or deleting their pledges, the project still sailed past its required funding – albeit at a good £3,000 less than planned. This in turn has led people to question whether the project will actually reach fruition, or if the monies earned will go towards Elite's current liabilities, which are currently listed as £81,388. Recent posts in February, however, confirm the machine is still being made.

"They are profiting off of other peoples' work"
Stephen Crow

We've contacted Steve Wilcox and he directed us towards his public statement on Elite's official website. The statement mentions that he has asked to have all relevant Elite apps withdrawn from Apple's store (which has now happened). He's also looking at paying the developers, revealing the following information.

"I am working toward that unacceptable position being remedied within the next 28 days, sooner if possible." Steve goes on to say that "The public statements are far too wide ranging to be addressed in a single response. However I acknowledge that I, as a director, may have failed in my duty to ensure that some of the reports and some of the payments due to the ZX Spectrum game developers – with whom Elite has contractual relationships – were made in accordance with the agreed terms." He finishes off by revealing, "This has been a personally chastening experience."

It's unclear at this time whether the developers will be taking legal action against Elite, if Elite itself can survive the very public exposure, or if the Kickstarter that started it all this comes to fruition. More news as we get it. ★

Dev Story

» The developers currently out of pocket

Rod Bowkett
Costa Panayi
Stephen Crow
Jonathan Cauldwell
Julian Gollop
Chris Hinsley
Mike Lewis
John Ritman
Steve Wetherill
Sandy White
Bob Smith
Ian Stwart
Simon Ullyatt
Roger Hulley
David Jones



Developer Sound Bites

"I think it went unnoticed for so long because each individual developer was probably owed a small amount and did not realise that so many other developers were being treated the same way. Once we all got talking via email and message boards people quickly realized what Steve Wilcox had been up to"
Stephen Crow on how the payments went unnoticed

"Their statements show they are trying to convince everyone that a few accounting mistakes were made, and hope to go back to business as usual after 28 days"
Costa Panayi is unconvinced about Elite's intentions



» [Spectrum] Sandy White is another developer who hasn't received payment for titles like *Ant Attack*.



» [Spectrum] At least 15 developers have come forward over missing payments so far.

Readers Weigh-In

» Will you be buying new Elite products?

r0jaws
If they clean up their act, and make restitution to those they owe money to, then I would. Otherwise no.

HalcyonDaze00
If they released something I really wanted then yes.

Lost Dragon
No. The whole incident has left a very bad taste in my mouth. In short, why support them when you can support the company that brings us Spectacular.

YOUR GUIDE TO OUR BRAND NEW WEBSITE

LEARN HOW YOU CAN BE A CRITICAL PART OF OUR EXCITING NEW WEBSITE

After a lot of hard work, we're delighted to announce that we have a brand new website for you all to enjoy.

We realise that many of you enjoyed our original website, so we have worked hard to ensure that any classic game profiles you may have written have carried across to the new website. This means that there's already a wealth of content to enjoy, but it will continue to expand as we add more classic **Retro Gamer** articles to it.

Of course, the real beauty of the **Retro Gamer** website is that it's also created especially for you, so you have a large amount of interactivity that enables you upload new game profiles, show off your precious gaming collections and tells us what you love about gaming in general.

Prizes will be given out to the best profiles and the best pieces will also appear in the magazine, so don't delay and head on over to **www.retrogamer.net**



GAME PROFILES

1 This is where you are able to browse our extensive games database and add your own choices with our easy-to-follow instructions.

RG PICKS

2 This is where you can look at Future Classics, view the videos we post up or simply add profiles on your favourite retro related items. If you love then let us know.

RETROBATES

3 Proud of your collection? Got a rare game you want to show off to the world? Then share it online and join our growing pool of fellow retrobates.

CLASSIC CONTENT

4 We're aware that not all our readers have been with us from the beginning so you'll be able to read classic abridged content online.

THEMES

5 Decorate the website with a unique gaming theme. So far we have ZX Spectrum, PC-DOS and Commodore 64, but we'd love to hear more suggestions.

JOIN IN

6 There are numerous ways in which you can interact with the site, whether its visiting our busy forum or simply adding your own game profiles and 'Why I love' profiles.

THE VAULT

THE COOL RETRO STUFF THAT WE'VE HAD OUR EYE ON THIS MONTH

Nintendo N64 USB Controller



For many, Nintendo's N64 joypad remains one of the best ever designed. Funstock thinks so too, as it's currently selling this funky USB version of the popular pad at a decent price. While it's perfect for those who use emulators, it's also compatible with modern games, which should make evenings with *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag* and *Left 4 Dead 2* very entertaining.

Price: £19.99
From: www.funstock.co.uk

Sonic The Hedgehog Plush Backpack



Everyone loves Sega's iconic hedgehog and now you can carry him with you wherever you go. Officially licensed by Sega, this cute backpack is light and durable and features adjustable straps allowing it to fit all *Sonic* fans no matter their size. You could even cut the straps off as use it as a cuddly toy. Probably…

Price: £24.99
From: www.funstock.co.uk

> **"An interesting twist to the usual game of block building"**

Jenga Tetris



As if the classic Hasbro game wasn't tough enough! *Tetris* brings an interesting new twist to the usual game of block building as it features six shapes from the classic game and introduces interesting new play mechanics, including letting you pick the next player if you complete a block. Made from bright durable pieces, *Jenga Tetris* is the perfect way to celebrate the game's 30th anniversary this year.

Price: £13.37
From: www.amazon.co.uk

Pac-Man Stress Ball



Good old Pac-Man. He's not just there for the fun things in life like munching ghosts and navigating mazes, but also wants to help for the bad things as well. A simple squeeze of this delightful stress ball will erase all your worries in an instant – perfect for those late deadlines.

Price: £3.99
From: www.amazon.co.uk



PICK OF THE MONTH

Dingoo A330

It may be modelled on Sony's PSP, but there's a lot more to the Dingoo A330 than first meets the eye. This powerful little handheld is designed for those that love to dabble in the emulation scene, and it already supports a large number of systems. The ColecoVision, MSX, Super NES and WonderSwan Color are just a few of the 14 systems that are supported by the device, making it ideal for those who follow the homebrew scene.

Powered by a 400 MHz CPU and sporting 4GB flash internal storage, the A330 has a 2.8" display supporting a resolution of 320x240. It can play a wide range of video formats, from WMV1 to MPEG2, supports a range of popular audio formats including MP3, AC3 and FLAC and even sports a built-in FM radio tuner and mic. A versatile little handheld.

Price: £89.99 **From: www.funstock.co.uk**

Retro Gamer Coasters

Erase annoying drink rings and get a blast of nostalgia at the same time with our awesome coasters. Available in packs of four, this tough durable coasters feature some of the best **Retro Gamer** covers we've ever produced, making them perfect for the loved ones in your life.

Price: £4.99
From: www.imagineshop.co.uk



5 March – 27 March

retrodiary

>> A month of retro events both past and present



5 March 1981
■ Sir Clive Sinclair's ZX81 goes on sale, although only through mail order and in kit form.



7 March 2008
■ *Bully*, the controversial open-world action-adventure game, is released on Xbox 360 and Nintendo Wii. Now give me your dinner money…



7 March 2014
■ The *South Park* RPG *The Stick Of Truth* is expected to be released in Europe on PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360.

8 March 1922
■ Videogames pioneer and inventor, Ralph Baer, is born in Germany.





12 March 1982
■ The Atari 2600 port of Namco's *Pac-Man* arrives to huge fanfare. Did you keep your receipt?



11 March 2005
■ Nintendo's handheld console, the DS, is finally released in Europe.



9 March 1999
■ *Mario Party* for the Nintendo 64 arrives on UK shores.



8 March 1991
■ Capcom releases its *Street Fighter II* coin-op into arcades. Hadouken!



14 March 2002
■ Microsoft's Xbox console is released in Europe and the UK.



16 March 1987
■ The Ritman and Drummond isometric masterpiece *Head Over Heels* is released on the Spectrum and Amstrad.



16 March 1999
■ *EverQuest*, the 3D fantasy-based MMORPG, is released by Sony.



17 March 2006
■ *Sonic Riders*, a racing game featuring Sonic the Hedgehog, is released on the Nintendo GameCube.



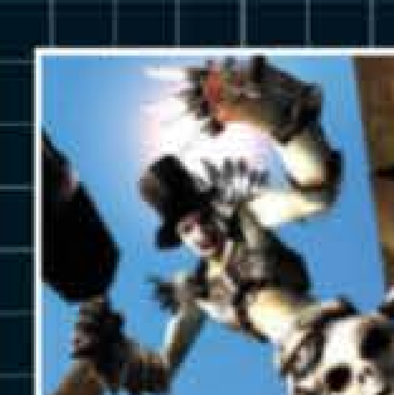
20 March 2014
■ *Metal Gear Solid V: Ground Zeroes* is due for release in Europe. Snaaaaaaake!



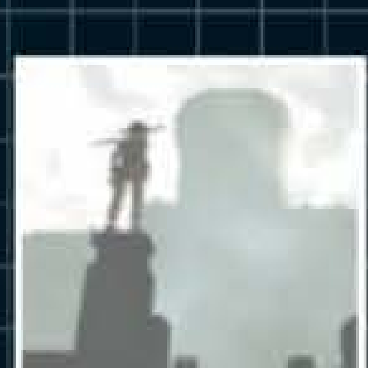
20 March 1997
■ Namco releases its third instalment of the *Tekken* series into the arcades.



19 March 1998
■ *Descent: FreeSpace – The Great War*, a space combat sim by Interplay, is released on PC.



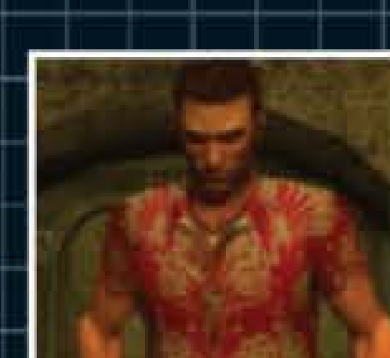
18 March 2004
■ The futuristic first-person shooter *Unreal Tournament* 2004 is published by Atari and released on PC.



22 March 2002
■ The beautifully designed action-adventure game *Ico* is released in Europe on the PlayStation 2.



25 March 2011
■ Nintendo releases its newest handheld console, the 3DS, across Europe.

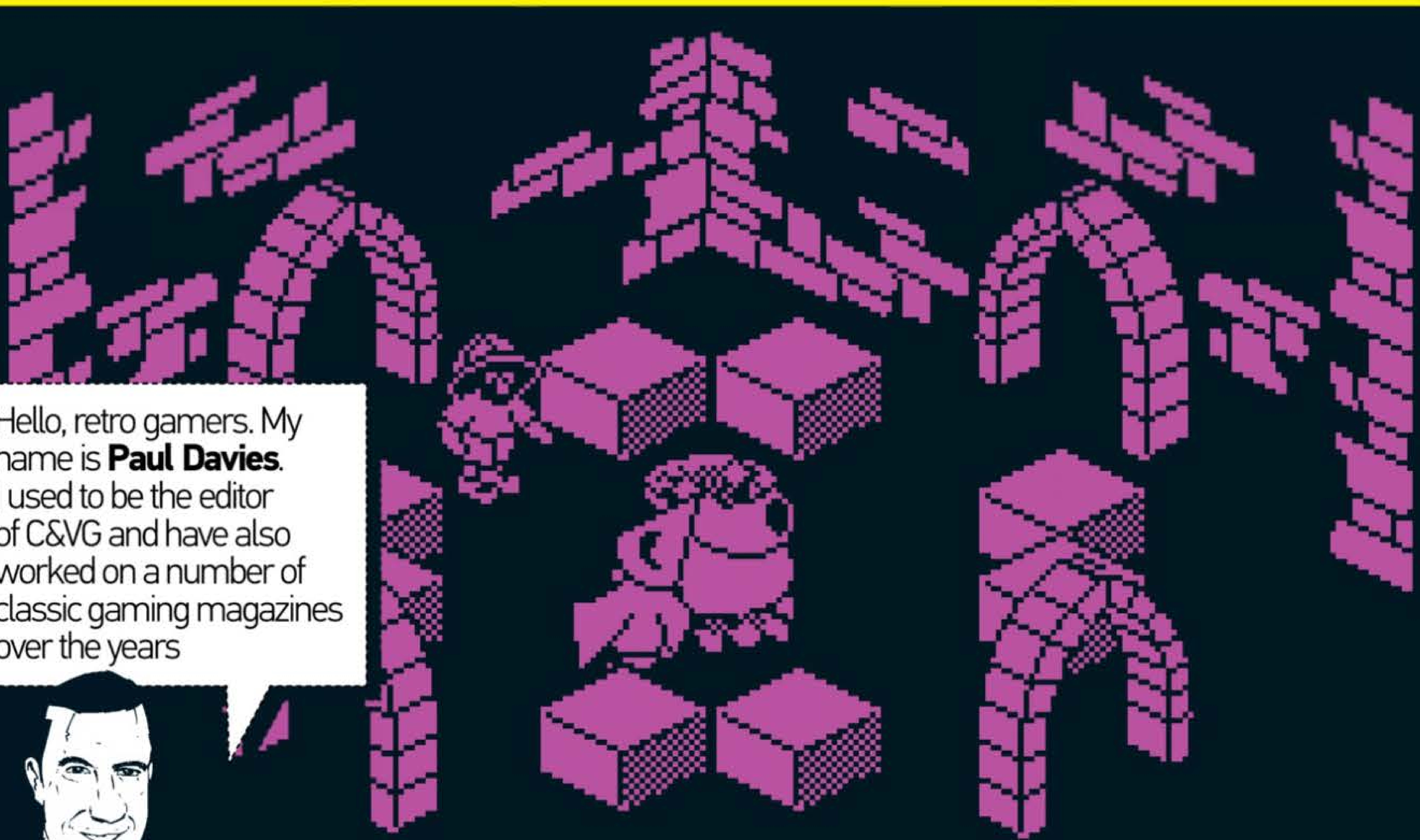


26 March 2004
■ The first game in the *Far Cry* first-person shooter series is released on PC.



27 March 2014
■ New issue of **Retro Gamer** hits the streets.

Here's my bio...
In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *C&VG*. I led the *C&VG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.



Hello, retro gamers. My name is **Paul Davies**. I used to be the editor of C&VG and have also worked on a number of classic gaming magazines over the years



My Ultimate dream

Ever since Matthew Smith gave us *Manic Miner*, a select few game developers have become celebrities in our bleary eyes. But it was Ultimate Play The Game (now Rare) that first seemed like gods to me.

There were countless games factory-saved onto cassette tapes in the Eighties, promoted by thousands of ads in dozens of colourful UK computer magazines. Yet nothing, and nobody, appeared quite as regal as anything from Ultimate Play The Game.

Ultimate print ads alone held some kind of hypnotic sway, perhaps something woven into the Celtic designs? As I recall, to the depths of my aging bones, every game from Ultimate in the classic early-Eighties era was received like a dose of pure, undiluted magic. Hooked by *Atic Atac* (such an awesome name), dazzled by *Pssst*, reaching for the graph paper to map *Sabre Wulf* for me and my pals, each one of the legendary Ultimate games was on occasion akin to a new *Indiana Jones* film at the flicks. But just as Cameron's *Terminator* changed the action-movie landscape in 1984, Ultimate's *Knight Lore* was almost too wild to comprehend upon first arrival.

I'm very ashamed to say that I don't remember reaching the end of *Knight Lore*, though I've started it many times. One of those games that seemed too big and beyond me as a lowly kid; I found its Filmation technology to be intimidating. Looking back at the imagery now, the playfulness is obvious, but back then my 15-year-old mind was cast under a spell by the runic design of the packaging and the unsettling sense of space and form within each room. You know what, immediately after writing this I'm going to exorcise this demon once and for all and finish this mother-forgetter!

Adding to the mystique was the gulf that existed between players and the creators in those times. Games appeared on the shelves in places like WHSmiths and Woolworths as though delivered by ELO's flying saucer. I imagined the Ultimate Play The Game factory to be like the USS Cygnus from Disney's *The Black Hole*, although possibly friendlier like Charlie's Chocolate Factory but employees would resemble UK Goth-mongers The Cure. You can imagine how shocked I was the first time I saw a photo of the Stamper brothers...

It is certainly Ultimate that is forever imprinted on my brain as the first mega-studio, that I realised comprised more than their fair share of clever people. Prior to that I hadn't thought too much about the human element behind arcade games from Taito, Namco and Konami; these were entirely alien!

And to this day, after well-documented ups and downs, the aura of awesome has never really left the company that became Rare. If you'd like to check out its official website (rare.co.uk) that Ski Resort cum *Logan's Run* city of the future is more or less exactly as I imagine the new factory to look like. And on the few occasions I get to meet the folks allowed to escape from there for a press tour on behalf of Microsoft, it's like shaking hands with beings from another world.

Not that I'll ever be invited to go there, but if I were I might politely decline because I'm happier in this dream that they all started.



WIN AN AWESOME SELECTION OF GAMING GOODS WORTH OVER £400

TO ENTER, TAKE THE RETRO GAMER READER SURVEY AT RETROGAMER.NET/SURVEY



Everyone loves to win free things, and we've got a large selection of goodies to give away in our fantastic prize that one lucky Retro Gamer reader can win. We've teamed up with a selection of publishers, including Bandai Namco, FunStock, Capcom, Titan Books, Sumthing Else and Tokyoflash to deliver a range of awesome prices.

There are great games, including *Lost Planet 3* and *The Witcher 2: Assassins Of Kings*, awesome art books about *Thief*, *Castlevania* and *Assassin's Creed*, a funky Seven Watch from Tokyoflash and a Dingoo A330 Retro Gaming Console courtesy of FunStock.

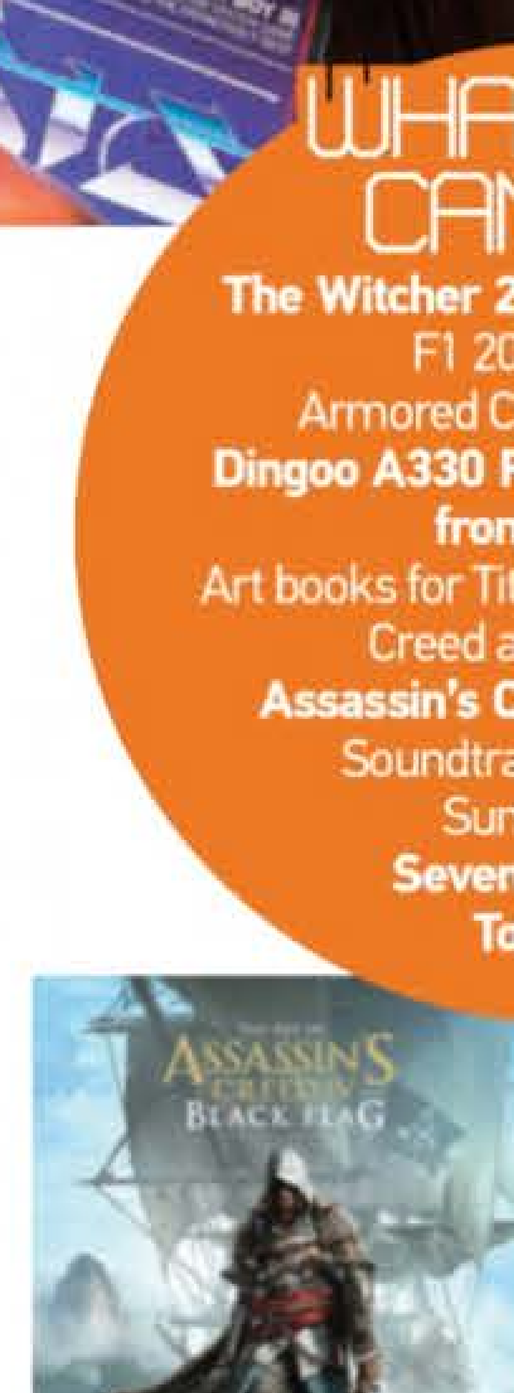
For a chance of winning this amazing selection of goodies simple go to **www.retrogamer.net/survey** and fill out the simple Retro Survey. The competition closes on 20 March 2014.

Rules

This competition is open to residents of the UK and Ireland. Imagine Publishing has the right to substitute the prize for a similar item of equal or higher value. Employees of Imagine Publishing (inc freelancers), their relatives, or any agents are not eligible to enter. The editor's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. Prizes cannot be exchanged for cash. Full terms and conditions are available on request. From time to time Imagine Publishing or its agents may send you related material or special offers. If you do not want to receive this state it clearly on your entry.

WHAT YOU CAN WIN

The Witcher 2: Assassins Of Kings
F1 2013 **Defiance**
Armored Core **Lost Planet 3**
Dingoo A330 Retro Gaming console from Funstock
Art books for Titanfall, Thief, Assassin's Creed and Castlevania
Assassin's Creed graphic novel
Soundtrack to Thief from Sumthing Else
Seven Watch from Tokyoflash





BACK TO THE EIGHTIES

THE LATEST NEWS FROM OCTOBER 1980

CHARTS

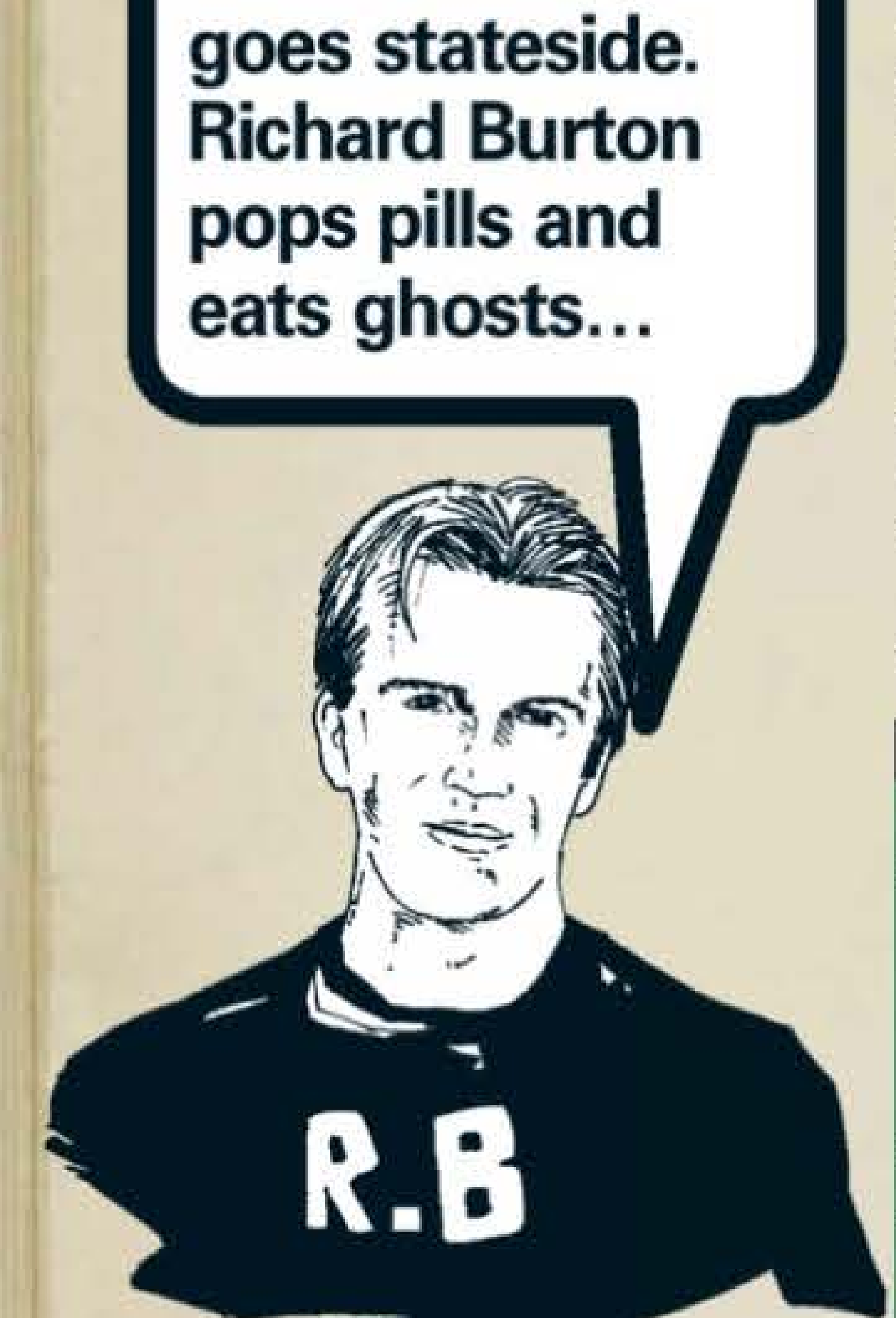
OCTOBER 1980

ARCADE



1. Missile Command (Atari)
2. Asteroids (Atari)
3. Galaxian (Midway)
4. Space Invaders Part II (Midway)
5. Space Invaders (Midway)

OCTOBER 1980 – Stern goes Berzerk, Namco is driven to add X-factor, Nintendo pocket gaming is Judged, Taito fights an Indian Battle, SNK introduces the ginger ninja while Pac-Man goes stateside. Richard Burton pops pills and eats ghosts…



Stern Electronics released its newest arcade offering this month, a multi-directional shoot-'em-up maze game called *Berzerk*. You took control of a green humanoid stickman figure that had to progress through a simplistic maze shooting the robots that lurked there while keeping its distance from the deadly electrified walls.

Should you dawdle about for too long your arch enemy Evil Otto appeared and pursued you until you were caught or left the maze. It was then onto the next room – there were a finger-blistering 65,536, although rooms were repeated several times making for 1,024 different layouts.

Berzerk was playable and addictive, helped in no small part by having a terrific sense of humour. The robots in the rooms were infamous for being utterly useless. They would often shoot themselves or other robots or wander into the deadly walls for no reason.

Berzerk also featured a varied speech synthesised vocabulary with phrases such as "Chicken! Fight like a robot" if you exited the maze before despatching all the robots or "coin detected in pocket" when the high score list was showing when the game wasn't in play.

Namco's newest arcade release was also a maze game. In *Rally-X* you were required to find ten yellow flags without crashing or being bumped by the computer-controlled cars. While that sounds easy, the incessant convoy of cars on your tail, rocks in the road, fuel consumption and time restraints helped pile on the pressure. However, you had a radar that located off-screen flags and incoming vehicles. Yep, it was uncomplicated and undemanding, but also very good fun.

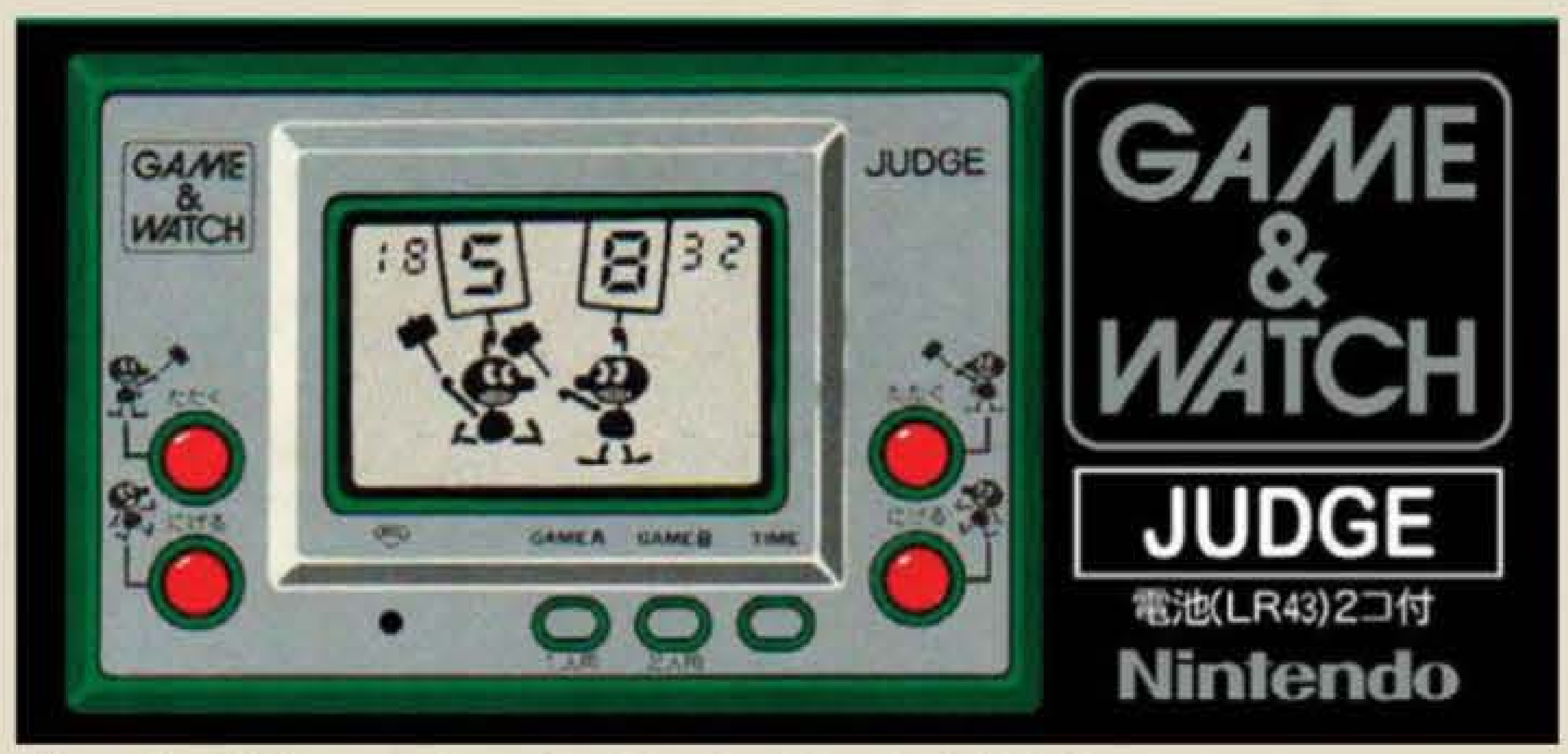


» [Arcade] Protect your base and shoot down 20 of those pesky enemy tanks to progress to the next level.

Namco's next coin-op release was a multi-directional shooter called *Tank Battalion*. You controlled a tank and had to stop the enemy from destroying your base. There were 20 tanks to thwart and all had to be cleared before you could progress to the next level. Should your base get destroyed or you lost all your lives then it was game over.

It was another simple yet effective game from Namco that didn't find an audience in arcade land. However, it must've had a fan base somewhere, as it was later ported to several home systems including the ZX Spectrum and MSX, while Namco itself released a multiplayer sequel entitled *Tank Force*.

The last of a trio of coin-ops released by Namco was the American release of a mildly successful maze game called *Pac-Man*, which had been first released in Japan six months earlier as *Puck-Man*. Apparently, it went on to do rather well…



» [Game & Watch] *Judge* was arguably one of the drabbest Game & Watch handhelds that Nintendo released.

Nintendo's new Game & Watch offering, *Judge*, the fifth and final game in the Silver series was released on 4 October. Disappointingly, *Judge* proved to be one of Nintendo's less playable and least successful handhelds.

Gameplay consisted of two characters holding hammers. After a brief countdown each held up a random number on a card with the person holding the highest number having to attack the other while the opponent had to dodge the attack… and that was it. No variation, no excitement and very little to do in terms of control and gameplay. *Judge* proved to be guilty of first-degree boredom.

Back in arcade territory there were a number of smaller releases awaiting their turn for release with their quality varying between hopeless and downright awful…

Nichibutsu released *Crazy Climber*, a game that saw you climb up the side of a building while dodging debris being thrown at you. Your aim was to catch the helicopter on the building's roof that took you to the next building/level.

Centuri, creator of *Phoenix*, released *Killer Comet*. It was a vertical shoot-'em-up with a strong whiff of *Space Invaders* about it. Sadly, it was also a stinker.

Not so whiffy was a similar-styled game but with a completely different theme. *Indian Battle* from Taito was







TANDY TRS-80	ATARI 2600	MUSIC
1 Hellfire Warrior (Automated Simulations)	**1** Championship Soccer (Atari)	**1** Don't Stand So Close To Me (Police)
2 Cosmic Patrol (Instant Software)	**2** Superman (Atari)	**2** Master Blaster (Jammin') (Stevie Wonder)
3 Planet Miners (Avalon Hill)	**3** Canyon Bomber (Atari)	**3** DISCO (Ottowan)
4 Temple Of Apshai (Automated Simulations)	**4** Circus Atari (Atari)	**4** Baggy Trousers (Madness)
5 Super Nova (Big Five Software)	**5** Sky Diver (Atari)	**5** One Day I'll Fly Away (Randy Crawford)



» [Arcade] *Sasuke Vs Commander* was oddly playable with its *Galaxian*-style gameplay featuring a ginger ninja.

another vertical shoot-'em-up that saw your cowboy character camped at the bottom of the screen attempting to wipe out the Indians in the desert above.

Cacti and rocks acted as shelter and occasionally an Indian would appear at the bottom of the screen to try and scalp you. It was essentially *Space Invaders* draped in politically incorrect clothing but nonetheless it was refreshing to see a shoot-'em-up that didn't involve aliens and space.

SNK released *Sasuke Vs Commander*, another vertical shoot-'em-up, which saw you play as a girl taking on an army of ninjas to protect her Shogun master. However, she wasn't completely defenceless, as the redheaded girl was also a ninja warrior bedecked with shuriken throwing stars. These stars were shot up-screen to kill the enemy ninjas. Once cleared it was onto a bonus/boss screen and then back for more of the star-throwing shenanigans.

Your ginger ninja girl also had to avoid the bodies of any dead ninjas, as their falling corpses also had to be sidestepped as you would lose a life if hit. *Sasuke Vs Commander* played and felt like *Galaxian* or *Galaga* yet the change of scenario and characters helped get the game noticed amongst the oodles of space-based guff.

Space Zap by Midway was set in space and came complete with alien attacks, but was a different type of beast compared to your standard shooter. *Space Zap* was more a test of both reactions and reflexes, with similarities to the colour and sound matching game *Simon*.

Your base was situated in the centre of the screen with alien spaceships attacking from all four directions. Luckily you had four corresponding lasers to keep them and their missiles at bay. The controls were simply four fire buttons for each of said lasers.

While *Space Zap* sounds another absurdly simple game, the sheer frenetic energy expelled from button mashing as you repelled fast multi-directional alien attacks would send your adrenal glands into overload. Who said videogames don't keep you fit? ✱

» [Arcade] Namco's *Rally-X* was expected to be the next big thing in coin-op gaming. Unfortunately it was released at the same time as *Pac-Man*...





» [Arcade] Stern Electronics brought us *Berzerk*, a brilliantly devised game chock full of speech synthesis and humour.



» [Arcade] *Space Zap* wasn't your conventional shooter, with a speedy trigger finger and plenty of caffeine enhanced reactions required.

OCTOBER WORLD NEWS

3 October saw the world premiere of David Lynch's *The Elephant Man*, a film based on the story of John Merrick (real name Joseph Merrick), who suffered from large and severe deformities. It followed his life and time as a freak show exhibit and his friendship with surgeon Frederick Treves. Merrick was played by John Hurt and Treves by Anthony Hopkins.

6 October saw the death of British comedy actress Hattie Jacques. She was a prominent actress of stage, screen and radio but would always be most fondly remembered for being a regular in the *Carry On* series.

10 October saw the then prime minister Margaret Thatcher make one of her most famous speeches. At the Conservative Party Conference in Brighton, she stated that current hard-hitting economic policies would continue despite reservations from her own party and with media speculation growing regarding possible U-turns on these policies. She defiantly declared, "You turn if you want to. The lady's not for turning". It became one of her most famous sound bites.

27 October was the television debut of the game show *Blockbusters*. The game involved two teams; one pair and a single player who must choose letters placed on hexagonal interlocking shapes and answer the corresponding question to link both sides of their board. The best of three winners progressed onto the harder Gold Run board.

Bob Holness was the host of the UK show but that didn't air until 1983. The original was of American design and hosted by Bill Cullen.

THIS MONTH IN...

COIN CONNECTION

The prominent story of the month was the impending release of *Battlezone*. The game used Atari's Quadrascan graphic display system (vector graphics) and the cabinet featured a periscope-style viewfinder for admiring the wireframe graphics. *Battlezone* was to be released in November.



MICRO

Micro: The 6502 Journal featured the sequel to the hugely popular *Dunjonquest: Temple Of Apshai* by Automated Simulations, the dungeon-crawling game for the TRS-80. *Hellfire Warrior* was more the same but featured the nice option of importing your character from the previous game into the new world.



SOFTSIDE

Softside featured Big Five Software and its shedload of new releases for you this month. The excitingly titled games were *Super Nova*, *Defence Command*, *Meteor Mission* and *Galaxy Invasion* or, to give them their non-cloned titles; *Asteroids*, *Missile Command*, *Lunar Rescue* and *Galaxian* respectively.



BACK TO THE NINETIES



» [Sega Saturn] While the X-Men are undoubtedly good and the *Street Fighter* cast are great combatants, who is best? Fight!



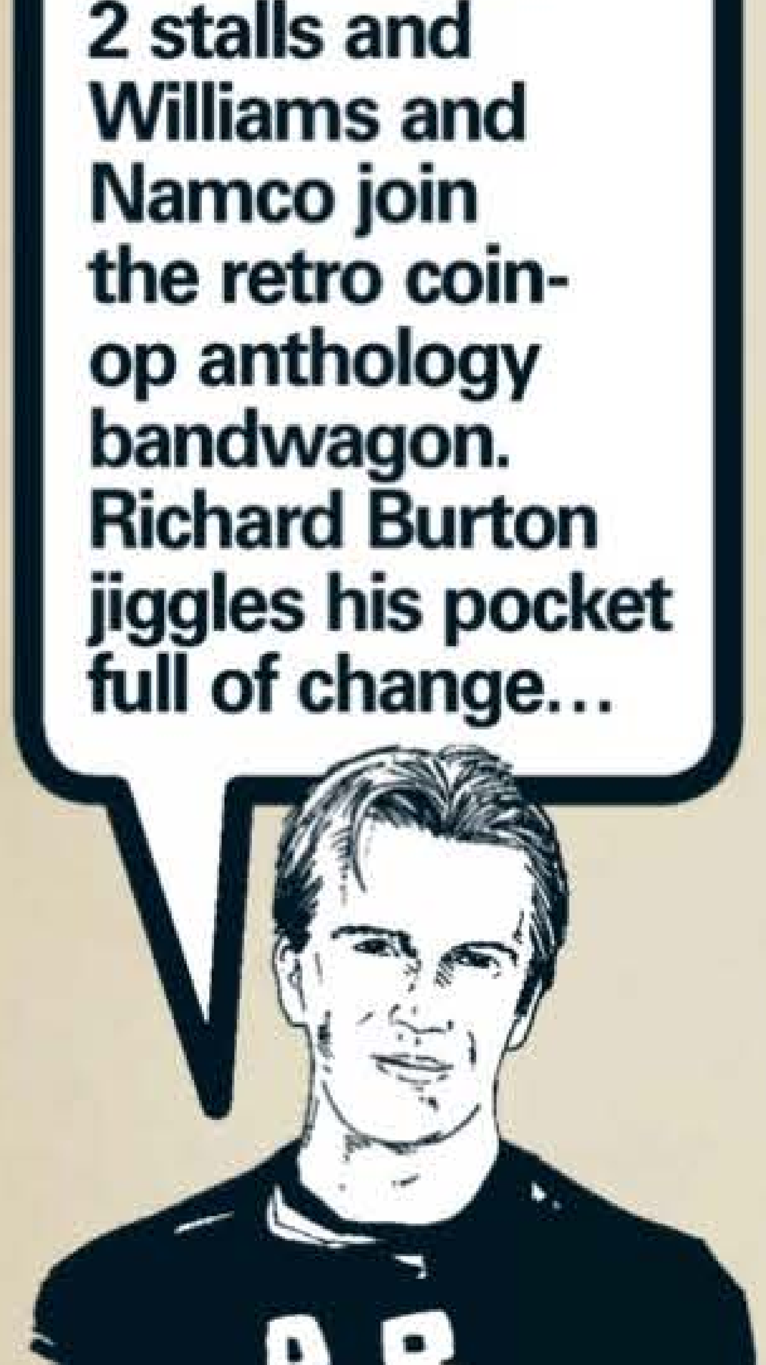
» [Amiga] The original game was superb. This sequel was fair but a change in gameplay style from cooperative to head-to-head left many cold.





THE LATEST NEWS FROM JANUARY 1997

JANUARY 1997 – Rare goes blasting, Sega blends fighters with Megamix, Twinkle Star Sprites empties your wallet, The Chaos Engine 2 stalls and Williams and Namco join the retro coin-op anthology bandwagon. Richard Burton jiggles his pocket full of change…



K*irby Air Ride* was a cutesy racing game featuring Kirby, the nauseatingly adorable puffball from the *Mario* games. He rode on the Warpstar which hovered above the track, making the racing experience feel somewhere between *F-Zero* and *Mario Kart*. Sadly, *Kirby Air Ride* would get nowhere near those two in terms of gameplay.

In fact, it would get nowhere near a Nintendo 64 either. Early previews of the game found it wanting in many departments and the game was duly cancelled. However, the remnants of the project resurfaced a few years later when the game was reworked for the Nintendo GameCube, and despite similar misgivings regarding gameplay it finally reached the shops with many wishing it hadn't.

There was better news with Rare's almost complete *Blast Dozer* – later renamed *Blast Corps* for Europe. It was part-strategy and part-action but definitely all destruction. A carrier transporting defective nuclear warheads was heading automatically to the detonation site. It couldn't be stopped and if the carrier hit anything then it was bye-bye world.

Your demolition team was tasked with clearing a path through the city and surrounding built-up areas with a heavy-duty selection of vehicles, ensuring smooth passage for the carrier, with much mayhem and demolition of buildings and houses. It was a uniquely fun game and also an N64 exclusive. Now all Europe needed was an official Nintendo 64 console launch…

Sega was ready to release its newest beat-'em-up for the Saturn, the impressive *Fighters Megamix*. As the name suggest, it was a smorgasbord of characters taken across several Sega games, all of which are a bit tasty with their fists. The majority of characters from *Virtua Fighter 2* and *Fighting Vipers* were included.

Interesting in-game options included changing the fighting style as *Virtua Fighter 2* and *Fighting Vipers* had differing styles of gameplay. Most characters also had new moves and the introduction of a dodge move let you avoid incoming attacks and allowed you to counterattack with great effect. The 3D graphics were beautifully crafted and the gameplay was fluid, ensuring that Sega had a hit.

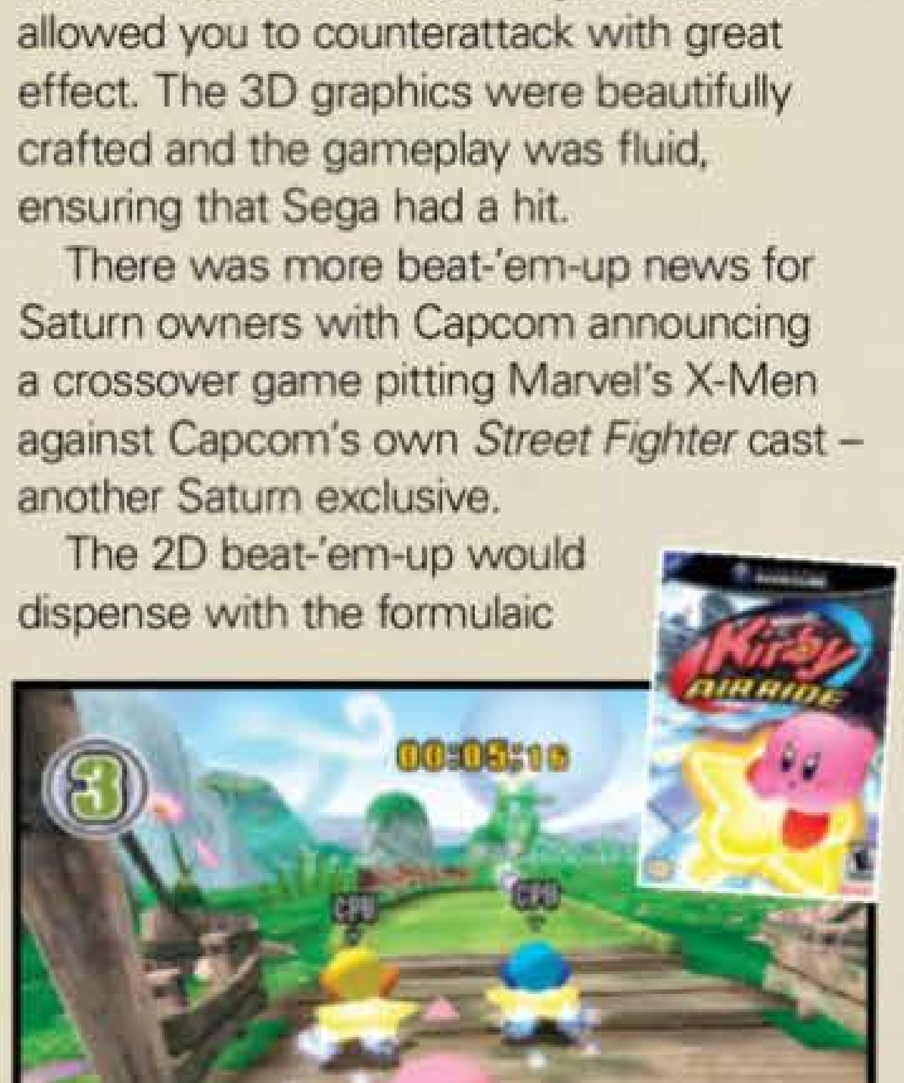
There was more beat-'em-up news for Saturn owners with Capcom announcing a crossover game pitting Marvel's X-Men against Capcom's own *Street Fighter* cast – another Saturn exclusive.

The 2D beat-'em-up would dispense with the formulaic one-on-one, best-out-of-three rounds system, instead plumping for a tag team battle option. The characters were well defined and graphically pleasing, with old *X-Men* favourites such as Wolverine, Gambit, Magneto and Juggernaut taking on the *Street Fighter* mainstays.

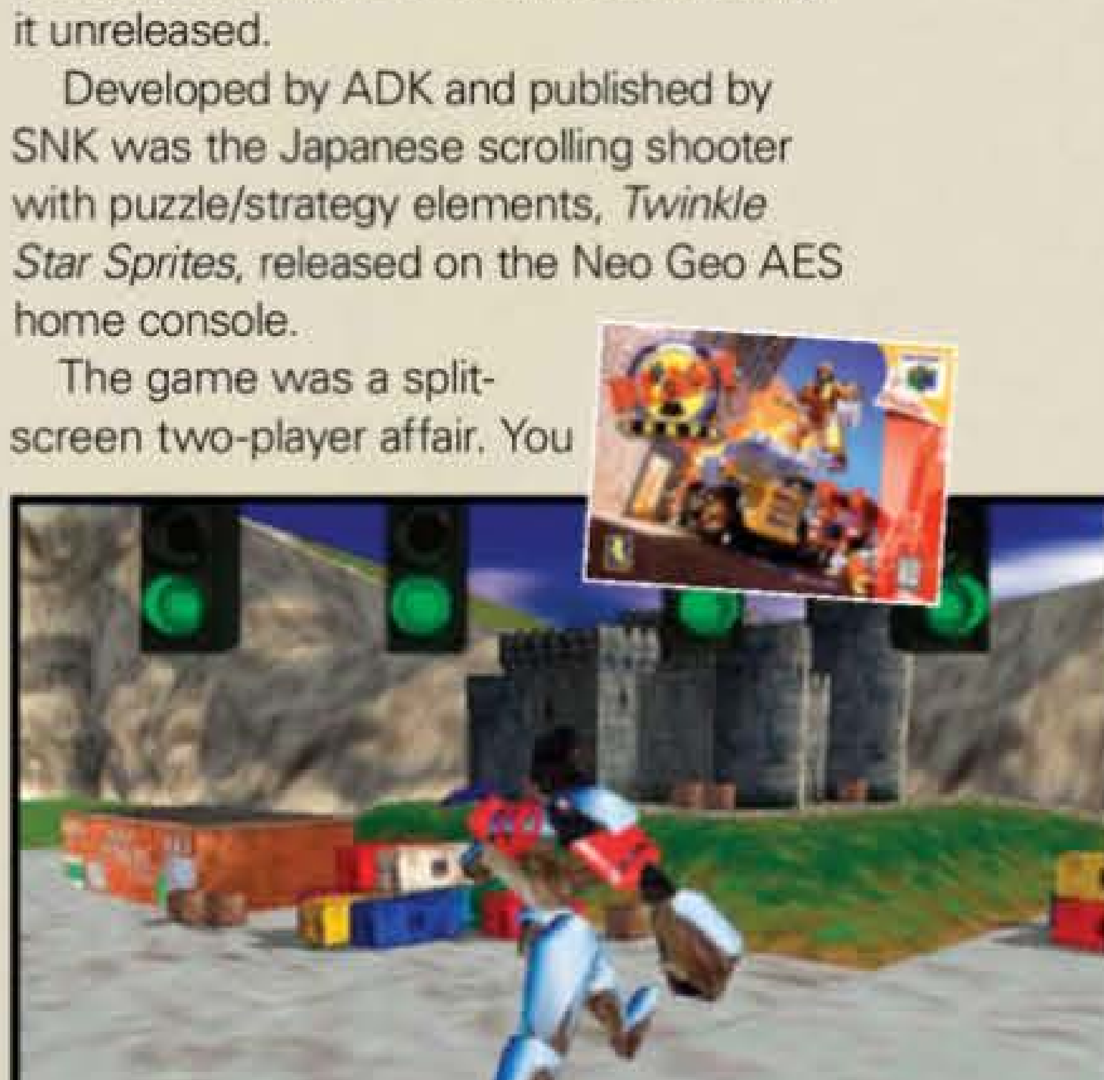
Although intended for a worldwide release, *X-Men Vs Street Fighter* became a Japan-only release. Also, the Saturn exclusivity was broken when a cut-down PlayStation version was released worldwide in 1998, although it was such a choppy conversion it might've been better leaving it unreleased.

Developed by ADK and published by SNK was the Japanese scrolling shooter with puzzle/strategy elements, *Twinkle Star Sprites*, released on the Neo Geo AES home console.

The game was a split-screen two-player affair. You



» [GameCube] Having been developed and ditched for the N64, the idea was rehashed and released on the GameCube.



» [Nintendo 64] Save the world by destroying buildings to ensure smooth passage for the dodgy nuclear missiles.

CHARTS

JANUARY 1997



SATURN

1. Tomb Raider (Core/Eidos)
2. Worldwide Soccer '97 (Sega)
3. Fighting Vipers (Sega)
4. Loaded (Gremlin)
5. NiGHTS Into Dreams (Sega)

MEGA DRIVE



1. Premier Manager '97 (Sega)
2. Toy Story (Sega)
3. Road Rash 2 (Electronic Arts Classics)
4. Desert Strike (Electronic Arts Classics)
5. Sonic And Knuckles (Sega)

PC



1. Syndicate Wars (Electronic Arts)
2. Championship Manager 2 1996/97 (Eidos)
3. Dark Forces: White Label (Virgin Games)
4. Flight Sim 6.0 (Microsoft)
5. Network Q Rally (Europress)

MUSIC



1. 2 Become 1 (Spice Girls)
2. Un-Break My heart (Toni Braxton)
3. Knockin' On Heaven's Door/ Throw These Guns Away (Dunblane)
4. One & One (Robert Miles)
5. Don't Cry For Me Argentina (Madonna)

» [Neo Geo AES] *Twinkle Star Sprites* is a rare and extremely pricey game to purchase nowadays.



THIS MONTH IN...

CU AMIGA

CU Amiga spoke to Graftgold's Andrew Braybrook about the state of videogaming today. Andrew said, "Games of the Eighties were much more playable than their counterparts now. We had to work hard on the gameplay because the graphics then were so limited."



AMIGA FORMAT

Amiga Format became the first UK computer magazine to give away two cover CDs at once. There was the usual CD version of *Amiga Format* with the demos and utilities, but also for AGA Amiga owners the riveting AGA Experience Volume 1. It contained mostly demos and utilities too…



COMPUTER & VIDEO GAMES

C&VG featured a write-up of the PlayStation Expo held in Tokyo, a launch-pad for many games where early previews were abundant. There were many highlights, but one that was touted as Game Of The Show was *PaRappa The Rappa*, the cartoon-like rhythm game.





» [Sega Saturn] *Fighters Megamix* was exactly as described; the best fighters from Sega's fighting franchises brought together for one almighty rumble.

shot a lot of enemies, and when you did they were sent over to your opponent's playing area to give them grief. Shooting the enemies in combinations really put pressure on your opponent, with their screen filling up at an alarming rate. However, these attacks on your opponent could be reversed, and before long the screen became a seething mass of coloured sprites.

There was a story mode for one-player gaming that saw you play a girl called Load Ran, accompanied by her hybrid rabbit/cat pet, and followed their quest to find the Twinkle Star and save the world. Gameplay was reasonable, but taking on a second player elevated the gameplay from average to excellent.

Twinkle Star Sprites was highly playable, unusual and addictive, with graphics that bombarded your eyeballs with all manner of cuteness and colour. Now, it is something of a rarity in AES form, with a minty-fresh copy costing up to £1,000.

Although more powerful consoles had superseded the Mega Drive and the SNES, there was still a steady trickle of games for the old girls. One of the best was a retro games anthology of five of Williams Electronics' best-loved arcade coin-op classics. *Williams Greatest Arcade Hits* included *Defender, Defender II, Joust, Sinistar* and *Robotron: 2084*.

Namco was playing the retro compilation card too with its release of *Namco Arcade Museum Volume 3*, although the games were more old than gold. *Volume 3* featured *Pole Position II, Ms Pac-Man, Dig Dug, Galaxian, Tower Of Druaga* and *Phozon*, although the RRP price of £44.99 for the anthology seemed a little excessive.

Amiga owners rejoiced with news that the Bitmap Brothers and Renegade had released *The Chaos Engine 2*, an isometric shooter in a split-screen format. The original Chaos Engine, a time machine, had been destroyed and its inventor Baron Fortesque had gone AWOL, having escaped through time just before its destruction.

Two players had to go back to recapture him, but they found that they were trapped in time and the only escape route was for them to work with the Baron to rebuild his machine. Whoever helped the most went free while the other died. There was no cooperative gaming here like the original. It was about collecting objects and escaping the level but, more importantly, gaining points. Escaping first with a lower score just didn't cut it with the Baron.

Reactions to *The Chaos Engine 2* were mixed. The press adored it, scoring it highly, while gamers were severely disappointed with it. As a standalone game it was okay, but as the sequel to a bona fide Amiga classic it was wretched. ★

NEWS JANUARY 1997

6 January saw Channel 4 close down and go off-air for the last time as the channel began broadcasting 24 hours a day as of early the following morning.

9 January saw 55-year-old British sailor Tony Bullimore rescued after surviving in an air pocket in his upturned boat, the Exide Challenger, for five days. It had been taking part in the Vendee Globe single-handed around-the-world race when it capsized on 5 January in the Southern Ocean. He lost all his food rations and survived on one chocolate bar until a rescue ship found his boat.



12 January saw *King Of The Hill* premiere on US television. The adult animated show followed a sitcom-style formula and was written by Mike Judge and Greg Daniels, creators of *Beavis And Butt-Head*. It proved popular and ran for 259 episodes spanning 13 series.

16 January saw American comedy actor Bill Cosby's son murdered in his car. Ennis Cosby was shot in an attempted robbery. He was aged 27.

Channel 4 was in the news again when its new satirical news-style programme *Brass Eye* went to air on 29 January. *Brass Eye* fell into the mockumentary genre of programming, satirising the mainstream media with its knee-jerk reactions and sensationalism.

The show was created and presented by Chris Morris, and ran for six episodes with a one-off special in 2001, the infamous 'Paedogeddon' episode that angered just about every suit in Westminster, even though most had not watched the programme.

retro GAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL





Grid Trap

WHEN BOMBS AND GRIDS COLLIDE…

#72

» LIVEWIRE SOFTWARE » COMMODORE 16/PLUS/4 » 1985

There aren't that many arcade conversions for the C16/Plus/4, and only a handful of them are of any high quality.

Many C16/Plus4 fans may not be aware that *Grid Trap* is actually based on a little-known coin-op called *Checkman*.

The game is played via keyboard or joystick. The idea is to diffuse all the bombs within a 30-second time limit, collecting as many flags as possible along the way. Your enemies are big bad bovver boots that move around the single screen trying to stomp you down in your progress. There are also death skulls that must be avoided at all costs.

Each move your little man head makes removes a tile from the 15x10 grid, and if you get stuck in a tile-less void you can roll the row along left and right until you can safely move along again and hopefully trap a boot in the process. Each level increases in speed and difficulty, with an extra boot on-screen to avoid. The bombs also tick down faster.

The only arcade omission I've found is the brief intermission screen between levels where your man jumps on the boots in revenge, like when Pac-Man flees before chasing the ghosts back.

The only real drawback to this conversion is that there is no high-score. I don't understand how anyone could forget to include such an obvious feature, as this is a very enjoyable arcade game in which you want just one more go. Otherwise, *Grid Trap* is a great rendition of an obscure but very enjoyable coin-op.

BARRY LENDRUM





KNIGHT LORE

A 30-YEAR LEGACY

Our story begins in '84
With a game that surpassed what came before
Martyn Carroll's at the castle door
To tell the tale of Knight Lore

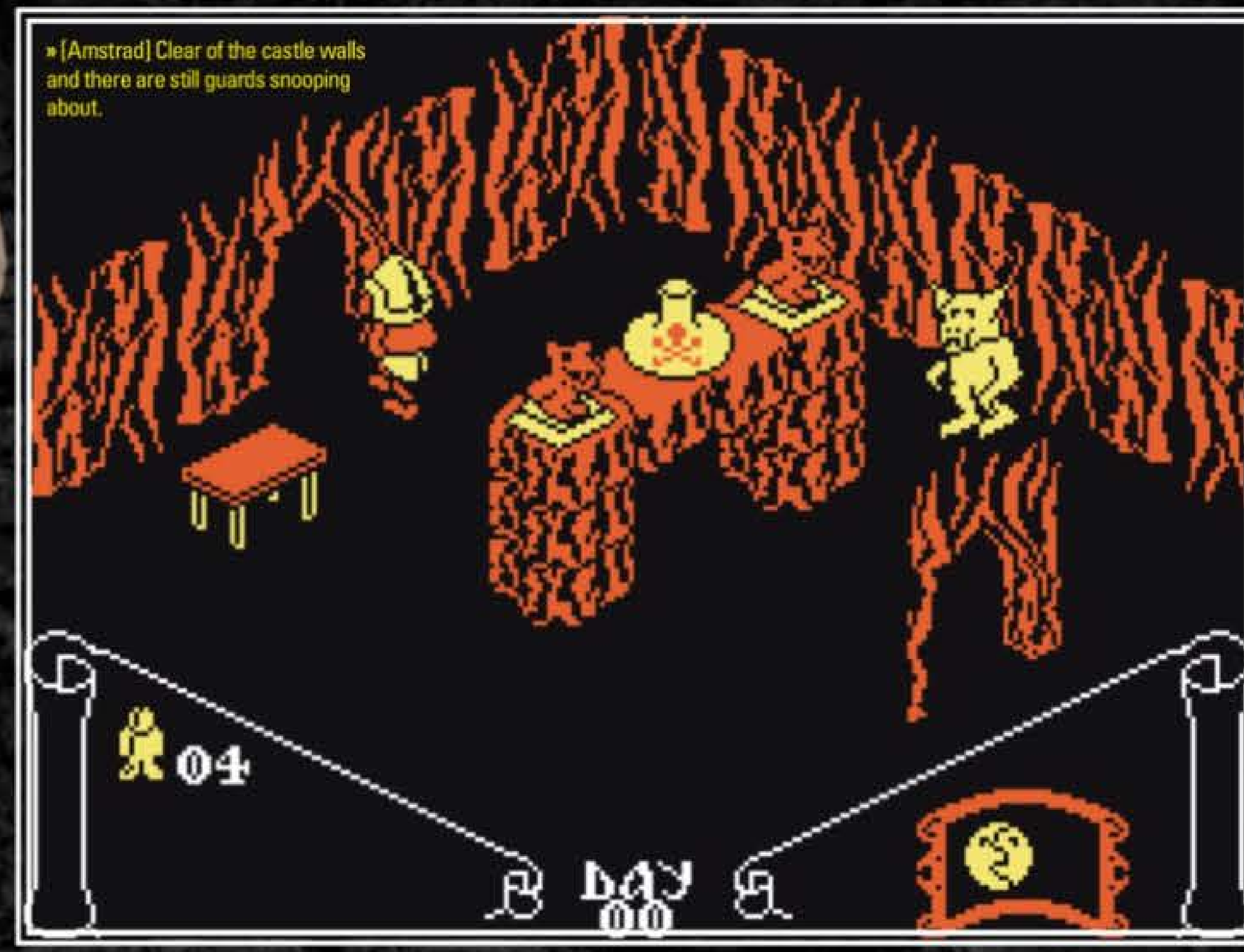
You could be forgiven for thinking that the Ultimate lot were a modest, unassuming bunch. The company rarely gave interviews after all, preferring to let its games do the talking. But when it did communicate with the press, usually to promote its latest release, it was anything but humble. Ultimate clearly knew it was streets ahead of the competition and was happy to emphasise the fact.

For the release of *Knight Lore* in November 1984 it banged the drum louder than ever before. In a statement to magazines, Ultimate revealed that *Knight Lore* was, no less, "the first step in a new generation of computer adventure simulation developments which represent the very pinnacle of software development on the 48K Spectrum". It seemed that even Ultimate's own back catalogue, which included instant classics like *Jetpac* and *Atic Atac*, had been surpassed by this pioneering new title.

In typical fashion there were no screenshots printed in the magazines, or on the glossy box in which the game shipped. Some clues could be found on the inlay while you waited impatiently for the game to load. The feature list included "superb graphics" and "amazing animation", as well as "3D scenario" and "3D movement". There was also another word, a made-up one that was presumably so clever and important that Ultimate felt the need to copyright it: 'Filmation'. This was the cinematic-sounding technique that would breathe an enormous amount of life into *Knight Lore*.

And come alive it did. The strange castle in which Ultimate hero Sabreman found himself was depicted using dazzling isometric graphics. *Knight Lore* may have lacked the colour and speed of Sabreman's previous adventures – *Sabre Wulf* and *Underwurlde* – but the 3D presentation represented an audacious leap forward. The castle walls, doors, platforms and pitfalls; everything simply popped off the screen. The characters were large and brilliantly animated too, particularly Sabreman himself who would glance around nervously as he explored the castle. The game's plot revealed that he'd fallen under a strange spell that caused him to regularly turn into a 'Werewulf', resulting in a comedic transformation sequence. This beastly change had very little effect on the gameplay and was almost like Ultimate smiling and saying "we could do it, so we did it".

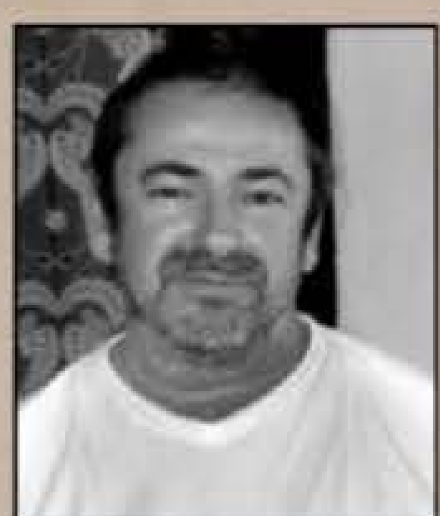
On first sight, let alone first play, it was impossible not to be impressed. Ultimate had truly delivered on its boast about pushing the boundaries of Spectrum software. For gamers who were there it almost certainly represented a 'moment', an unforgettable first glimpse etched in the mind alongside the likes of *Space Harrier* in ▶



» [Amstrad] Clear of the castle walls and there are still guards snooping about.

THE RITMAN REPORT

Jon Ritman reveals the magic behind Ultimate's Filmation effect



My jaw hit the floor when I first saw *Knight Lore*. The graphics were startling at the time, so lovingly rendered with no overlap corruption so common in other games. I loved the way sprites just neatly slid behind objects in front of them and when I first saw it I had no idea how it was achieved. Now I know that Chris Stamper had worked out how to put one sprite on top of another without corruption and also how to correctly order the sprites in a 3D world. This might seem like an easy task but it's far from it. For a start there are impossible situations such as the image to the right:



Here are three blocks, but which is in front? They're all in front of one of the other blocks but also behind one of the other blocks. Nowadays we use a Z-buffer that decides the depth for each individual pixel but the sort of processing power needed for that is far beyond the Spectrum. Chris had to draw an entire sprite at a time and do them in the correct order so it's quite amazing that it only occasionally messed up.

The perfect overlap of the sprite images is done by using a mask – a graphic the same size as the original but using a set bit to mean that the background should be preserved and an unset bit to indicate the background should be rubbed out:



First you perform an AND operation with the background, keeping all parts of the background that the black part of the mask overlaps and erasing the parts overlapped by the white part of the mask. Then you draw the final sprite into the hole. If you imagine a *Knight Lore* room and you perform this process for every item in the room, starting from the back and moving towards the front, you slowly build the entire picture. If a block is in front of Sabreman then its mask cuts away the required hole and the block is then dropped in the hole. This has to be repeated every time an object moves.

There are other nicely done technical features such as the collision detection but I think the two outlined above are the main things that made it such an innovative game. I wish I'd thought of it!

the arcade, *Wolfenstein 3D* on the PC, and *Super Mario 64* on the Nintendo 64.

The computer mags were singularly bowled over by the game. *Crash* called it "sheer perfection" and awarded it 94 per cent. "It's probably the best game yet produced for the Spectrum," wrote one *Newsfield* reviewer. "I honestly can't see how any real improvement can be made on this." *Computer & Video Games* loved it too, giving it nine out of ten and saying: "I've never seen graphics as good as this on any micro game. Ultimate claims that their game takes the Spectrum to its limits. Play *Knight Lore* and you'll believe them."

Popular Computing Weekly summed the game up nicely with the word "Cartoonesque". But to get a really good idea of how the 3D graphics flabbergasted critics of the day you only had to read the review in *Home Computing Weekly*: "Words fail me when trying to describe it," wrote Peter Sweasey. "The graphics have to be seen to be believed; they are in full 3D perspective and move so smoothly they represent a laserdisc. The animation is incredible. *Knight Lore* will probably revolutionise the software market."

The laserdisc simililarity was obviously barmy, but the suggestion that the game would revolutionise the software market was not far off the mark. In opening the doors to Castle Knight Lore and inviting players inside, Ultimate also opened the floodgates for rival publishers to release their own versions.

Knight Lore was far from the first game to trial isometric graphics. They'd previously featured in arcade games like Sega's *Zaxxon* and Gottlieb's *Q*bert*. And in the home, of course, there was Sandy White's seminal *Ant Attack*, which was released on the Spectrum in 1983. But it was *Knight Lore* that really defined and popularised isometric adventures on home computers. And by quickly following it up with another Filmation title, the space-set *Alien 8*, the isometric style became synonymous with Ultimate.

Knight Lore unsurprisingly topped the UK all-format charts in January 1985 (knocking Ultimate's own *Underwurlde* down to second place) and it was just a matter of time before similar games started to appear. In fact, publishers were actively seeking them. Just ask Bo Jangeborg. The Swedish programmer visited the UK in 1985 to finalise a deal, which would see The Edge publish his graphics package The Artist. While in London, Edge boss Tim Langdell revealed that he had programmers trying – and failing – to replicate *Knight Lore*.

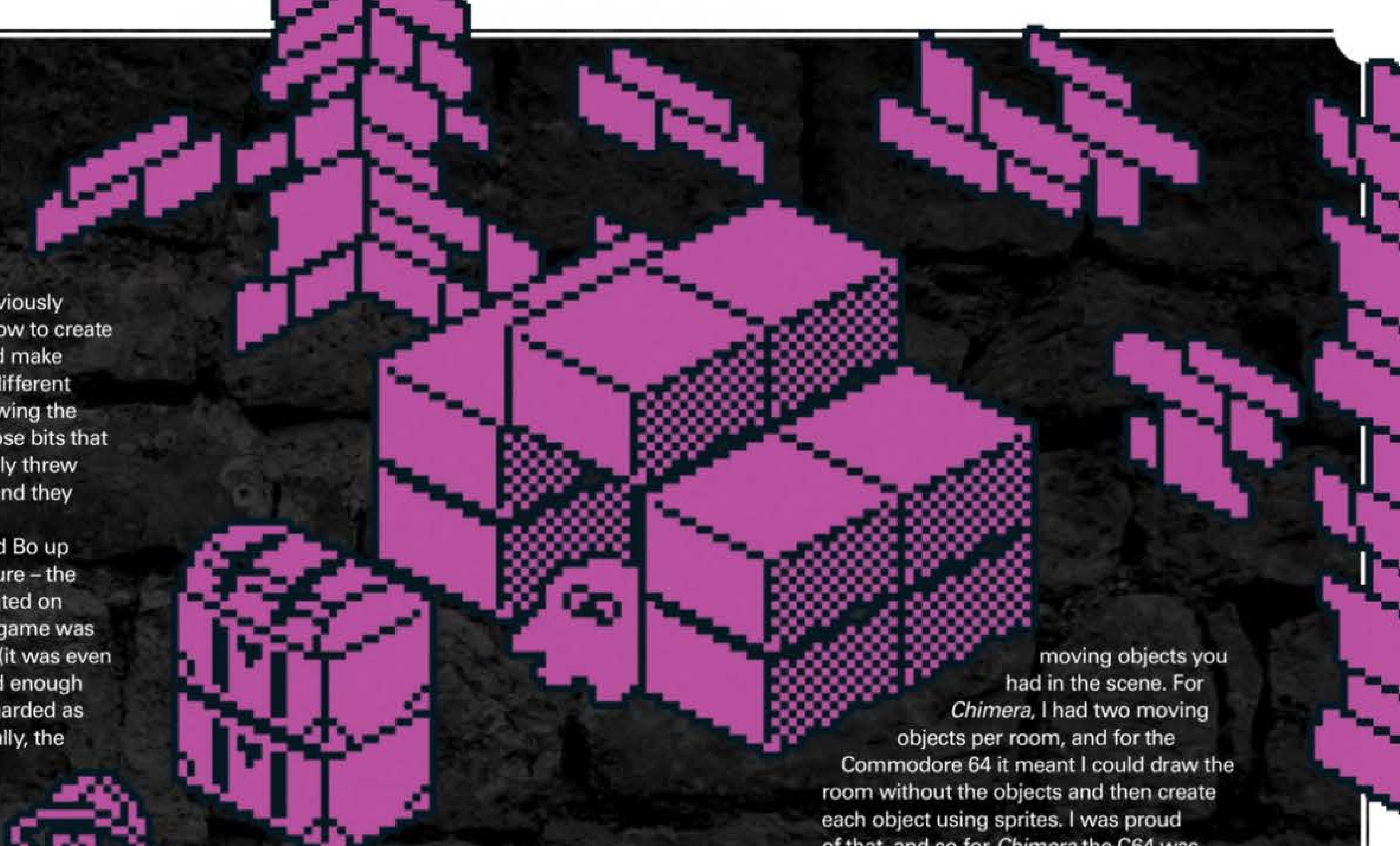
"They hadn't quite got the hang of it", says Bo. "They had something that was working but it was really flickering. So



» [Spectrum] Grabbing that bottle of poison requires some precision jumping.



» [Spectrum] Don't forget to pick up the block immediately after you've jumped. It's the vital, unwritten rule of *Knight Lore*.



I used a sprite routine I had previously developed just to show them how to create an isometric Ultimate game and make it look fluid and stable. I had a different technique where I wasn't redrawing the whole screen but rather just those bits that needed to be changed. I basically threw something together overnight and they were amazed."

The Edge immediately signed Bo up to develop an isometric adventure – the result was *Fairlight*, which debuted on the Spectrum in late 1985. The game was clearly indebted to *Knight Lore* (it was even set in a castle), but it introduced enough of its own innovations to be regarded as a classic in its own right. Naturally, the isometric system had its own rather grand name: Ultimate had Filmation, The Edge had '3D Worldmaker'!

Hot on the heels of *Fairlight* was *Chimera*, a more blatant Filmation clone that was released on Firebird's mid-price Super Silver label. For programmer Shahid Ahmad, *Chimera* was an unabashed love letter to *Knight Lore*. "I vividly recall seeing *Knight Lore* for the first time," he says. "At this point I was seriously considering quitting videogames altogether. I bought my copy, not knowing what to expect other than it featured Sabreman. What I felt after playing the game was shock. I had an old black and white TV but it didn't make any difference. I simply couldn't take in what I was seeing. Shock. Wonder. Colossal admiration. This was when I knew I was not done with videogames. It really was a life-changing moment."

Clearly buoyed, Shahid rattled out versions of *Chimera* for the Spectrum, Amstrad CPC, Commodore 64 and Atari 8-bit. During the process he discovered that you couldn't easily port isometric games from machine to machine; each version had to be tailored to best fit the hardware. "The machines all had their pluses and minuses and it depended on the number of moving objects you had in the scene. For *Chimera*, I had two moving objects per room, and for the Commodore 64 it meant I could draw the room without the objects and then create each object using sprites. I was proud of that, and so for *Chimera* the C64 was probably the best machine. Had there been more moving objects then the combination of low screen memory and fast Z80 made the Spectrum a better choice. The Amstrad had a fast Z80 too, but having twice the screen memory of the Spectrum made it harder to get good performance. The ▶

> **"I couldn't take in what I was seeing. Shock. Wonder. Colossal admiration"**
> Shahid Ahmad

FILMATION NATION

Following the wild success of Knight Lore, Ultimate released a further four Filmation games



ALIEN 8 1985

■ Before rival publishers could copy the *Knight Lore* concept, Ultimate quickly released a second Filmation game set on a spaceship and starring a charming little droid. It may have been a rush-job but it didn't show thanks to a massive new map, more involving puzzles and plenty of extra sheen.



NIGHTSHADE 1985

■ For this medieval adventure Ultimate introduced an updated version of the Filmation system that featured scrolling graphics and extra colour. Visually it was very clever, stunning even, but the lack of platforming and puzzle elements resulted in a rather bland run-around. A case of style over substance.



GUNFRIGHT 1986

■ Reportedly the last Ultimate game the Stampers worked on, this cowboy caper was a fitting swansong. It basically took the Filmation II framework and filled it with an entertaining game that was much more fun to play than *Nightshade*. First-person shoot-out scenes added some more variety to the gameplay.



PENTAGRAM 1986

■ Following the Filmation II titles, Ultimate resurrected the flick-screen approach for what would be its final Sabreman adventure. With more emphasis on action (you could now blast baddies), it was different enough to warrant interest. The fact that it's now rather coveted suggests it didn't sell particularly well.



» [Spectrum] Don't enter this room in wulf form otherwise the cauldron spits at you!





» [Spectrum] *Chimera*, the game that got Shahid Ahmad a conversion gig with Ultimate.



> "It was so clean, optimally designed, precise and contained. It just oozed quality"
>
> John Heap

Atari was beautiful but least suited to isometric because, despite the fast 6502, its sprites were not flexible enough so you had to do everything bitmapped.

Ultimate also set about bringing its Filmation games to other machines, with faithful versions of both *Knight Lore* and *Alien 8* appearing on the BBC Micro, Amstrad CPC and MSX in 1985. But typically it wasn't about to rest on its laurels and in August 1985 released *Nightshade* for the Spectrum. With this new adventure, Ultimate premiered its Filmation II system that swapped the flick-screen approach for a scrolling viewpoint.

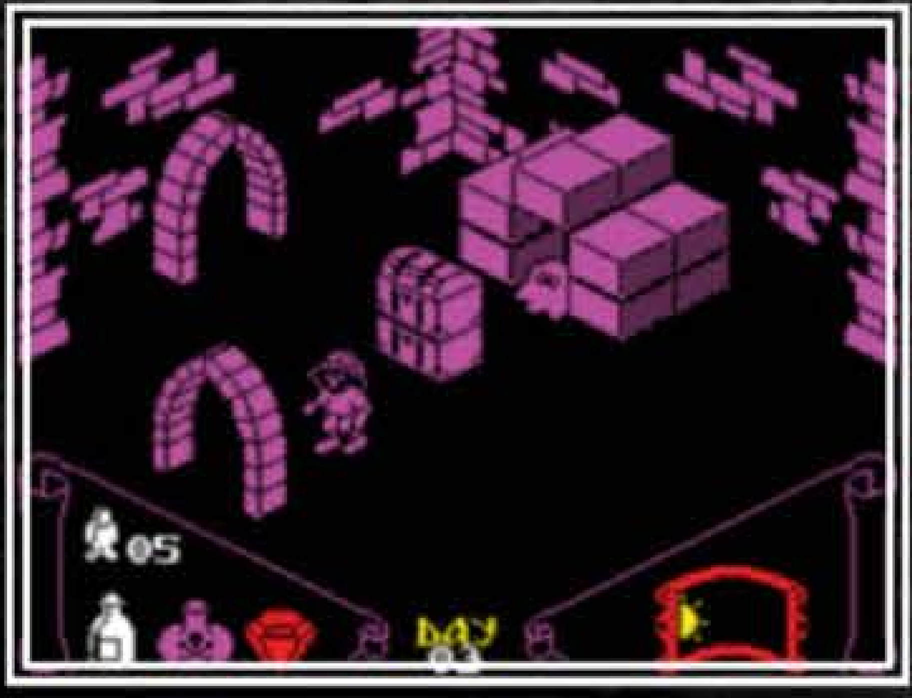
Proving that Ultimate viewed imitation as a form of flattery, the firm saw *Chimera* and offered Shahid the job of porting *Nightshade* to the Commodore 64. "The Stampers were smart," he says. "They knew I had the utmost respect for them and their work. That's also why they also asked me about doing the C64 versions of *Knight Lore* and *Alien 8*." Sadly for both Shahid and C64 gamers, he only converted *Nightshade* as the deal to do the other two fell through. "I wanted to do *Knight Lore* and *Alien 8* because I loved the games and would have done them for half anything Ultimate might have offered financially."

Having developed a flick-screen Filmation-style game and worked directly on a Filmation II title, Shahid is ideally placed to compare the two approaches. "The *Nightshade* system was hugely clever but it wasn't actually that flexible," he says. "The room-based system meant if you were clever you only had to update portions of the display that were changing and that's what gave you the performance you needed to pull off the look. Obviously they had the foundation of *Knight Lore* to build on, and for that reason, as well as the shock waves sent around the development world by the first Filmation system, I'd have to go with that for being the most innovative and groundbreaking of the two."

During 1986 the number of clones increased dramatically, with many of the bigger publishers putting out isometric games. Notable titles included *Sweevo's World* (Gargoyle), *Movie* (Ocean), *Quazatron* (Hewson), *Get Dexter* (PSS) and *Glider Rider* (Quicksilva). Cheapo game specialists Mastertronic also got in on the act with *Molecule Man*, and *Your Sinclair* magazine even published an isometric game called *Bubble Trouble* as a type-in listing.

From Design Design came two similar titles – *NEXOR* and *Nosferatu The Vampyre*. Both were written by Graham Stafford, another coder who recalls the impact of *Knight Lore*. "I can clearly remember when I first saw *Knight Lore*, though in a typically arrogant way I thought that it slowed down badly when too much was going on. But it was incredibly groundbreaking, as was *Jetpac* before it. In gaming terms Ultimate definitely set the agenda for many years."

The slow-down issue was something that affected many isometric titles and Graham reveals that there was no simple solution. "We addressed the problem the best we could," he says. "Firstly by coding as efficiently as possible, and secondly by designing the games so that the number of busy scenes was reduced. It could be argued that the latter limited the appeal of the games. Coding a game is always a tricky



» [Spectrum] Casper the Unfriendly Ghost tries to flatten our hero.



» [Amstrad CPC] Extra colour gives the CPC version a slight edge.

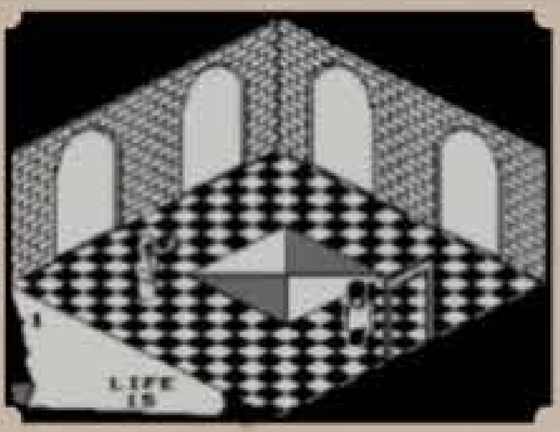


» [BBC Micro] The Acorn version has since been unofficially ported.

THE INFLUENCE OF KNIGHT LORE

Eight great games that built on the Filmation flick-screen approach

FAIRLIGHT 1985



■ One of the first Knight Lore clones was also one of the best. The isometric system developed by Bo Jangeborg allowed for a more realistic setting with a variety of room shapes and sizes. The game was also more puzzle-focussed as you had to find objects to unlock doors and access secret areas.

BATMAN 1986



■ Eclipsed by the following year's *Head Over Heels*, Jon Ritman and Bernie Drummond's first isometric adventure was nevertheless a hugely entertaining romp. The cover-art and loading screen aside, the game was closer in tone to the Sixties TV series (although sadly no flamboyant villains on show).

SWEEVO'S WORLD 1986



■ For this offbeat adventure the Gargoyle guys appeared to take *Knight Lore* and beat it around the head with a Monty Python fish. Yes it was very silly, but there was lots of fun to be had exploring the massive map (which was bigger still in the expanded Spectrum 128K version, *Sweevo's Whirled*).

GET DEXTER 1986



■ On the Amstrad CPC a lot of isometric games benefitted from a little extra colour. This game went much further than that with vibrant hues splashed all about, showing what could be done when isometric adventures were developed with the Amstrad CPC in mind. A quirky classic of warranted repute.

THE LAST NINJA 1987



■ Offering welcome respite from all the castles and space stations, *The Last Ninja* transported players to feudal Japan where combat, puzzles and exploration combined to create one of the Commodore 64's most celebrated titles. It was ported to many machines but the C64 original was king.

LA ABADIA DEL CRIMEN 1987



■ Unofficially based on Umberto Eco's medieval whodunit *The Name Of The Rose*, this brilliantly atmospheric adventure brought to life a foreboding Benedictine abbey on 8-bit machines. The graphics were stunning and the gameplay engrossing, making this one game you overlooked at your peril.

CADAVER 1990



■ The Bitmap Brothers developed this beautiful-looking isometric adventure for 16-bit computers. It was clearly inspired by the old Ultimate games and in a nice nod to the past was set in 'Castle Wulf'. It was challenging but rewarding, and offered a nice change of pace compared to the usual Bitmap output.

SOLSTICE 1990



■ If Rare had updated *Knight Lore* for the NES (discounting the odd Famicom version from Jaleco), then it would probably look a lot like *Solstice*. Featuring fantastic graphics and superb Tim Follin sound, this was one of the best-presented games on the NES. It provided players with a decent challenge too.

balancing act. In my opinion Jon Ritman's isometric games had the best balance."

Graham is of course referring to *Batman* and *Head Over Heels*, two fantastic titles written by Jon Ritman (with graphics by Bernie Drummond) and published by Ocean. This brace gave the format a much-needed boost just as isometric games were beginning to be seen as old hat. Jon has revealed in the past that *Knight Lore* left him absolutely gobsmacked and he knew instantly that he had to make a similar kind of game. In short, neither *Batman* nor *Head Over Heels* would have existed without *Knight Lore*.

One programmer who wasn't quite so overjoyed to witness *Knight Lore* was John Heap of Denton Designs. "I was pretty gutted when I first saw it," says John, who created the scrolling isometric adventure *The Great Escape*. "It was so clean, optimally designed, precise and contained. It just oozed quality. In comparison my sprawling prisoner of war camp looked slow and clumsy. They had taken a different technical approach, which appeared to be based on over- ▶



» THe BBC Micro version has a green box, while the Amstrad outing gets an orange one.



» [Famicom] Released for the Famicom Disk System in 1986, this bizarre version bore little relation to Ultimate's original.





» The curious cover-art to the Japanese MSX cartridge version. We're not sure Tim Stamper would have approved.

printing the scene components in the correct order. My approach was to treat the background as a normal 2D map but mask off the character sprites to give the appearance of going behind things. There was no way I could envisage overprinting all those fences and watch towers."

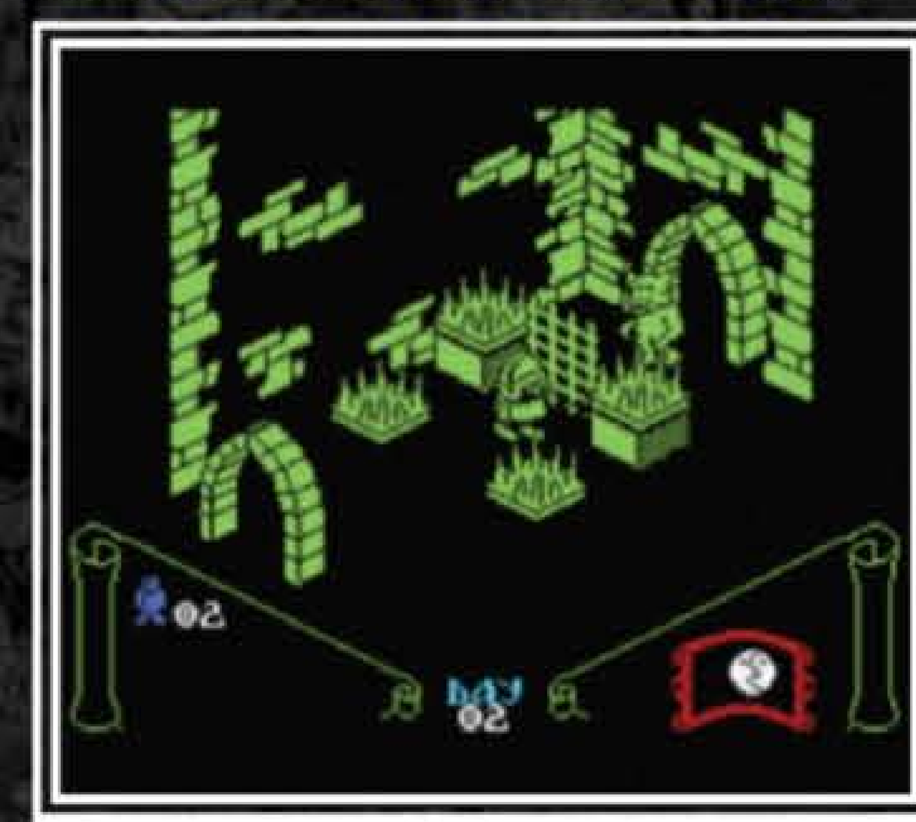
John admits that he viewed *Knight Lore* as more of a rival title than an inspiration, pushing him to create bigger and better games. It clearly worked, as his next project was the epic adventure *Where Time Stood Still*, which took nine months to develop. His admiration for the Stampers and their work remained however. "The Ultimate guys were very well respected by us 'normal' Spectrum developers," he says. "They were very much apart from the sometimes incestuous North West development scene, which helped their mystique immensely. If we'd been getting drunk with the Stampers on a Friday night we would have been less in awe, but we weren't. Whilst we were out getting shit-faced they were probably working on their next masterpiece and wondering why it was taking so long for all us other developers to catch up."

By 1987, the Stampers had sold off Ultimate to US Gold and set up Rare to develop games for Nintendo consoles. The last two titles released on the Ultimate label, *Martianoids* and *Bubbler*, were both isometric games but they were rather tired affairs. The format was far from exhausted however, as both the aforementioned *Head Over Heels* and System 3's *The Last Ninja* were two of the biggest hits of 1987.

Another classic example was also released this year, although you very likely missed it as it was never released outside of Spain. Opera Soft's *La Abadia Del Crimen* (The Abbey Of Crime) featured some of the most detailed and complex isometric graphics yet seen. "We wanted to do something new and different," reveals graphic artist Juan Delcan. "I got most of my ideas from the novel *The Name Of The Rose*, which the game was based on. This was combined with a lot of research of abbeys in the north of Spain, Germany and Italy. I also referred to illustrations from that period in time."

Juan was obviously disappointed that the game didn't receive a wider release. "It showed that it wasn't enough to create a good product, you needed to know how to market it too. We were young and wrongly thought that creating a good game was all we needed to worry about, the rest would happen on its own." It's gratifying then that the game's reputation has spread over the years. It has even been translated into different languages and unofficially ported to other machines.

» [MSX] The MSX version, which carries a Jaleco copyright message on the title screen, is almost identical to the original.





SOLSTICE KNIGHT

Mike Webb of Software Creations talks about developing Solstice, the closest thing to Knight Lore on the NES



Which isometric games inspired you to create *Solstice*?
The first isometric game I ever saw was *Ant Attack* on the Spectrum. That wasn't a patch on the later games but did demonstrate the possibilities. I did play the Ultimate games, but the one that I played most was *Batman* by Jon Ritman. I did speak with Jon a few times but not about coding isometric games. The techniques were so different between the Spectrum and NES that there was no comparison.

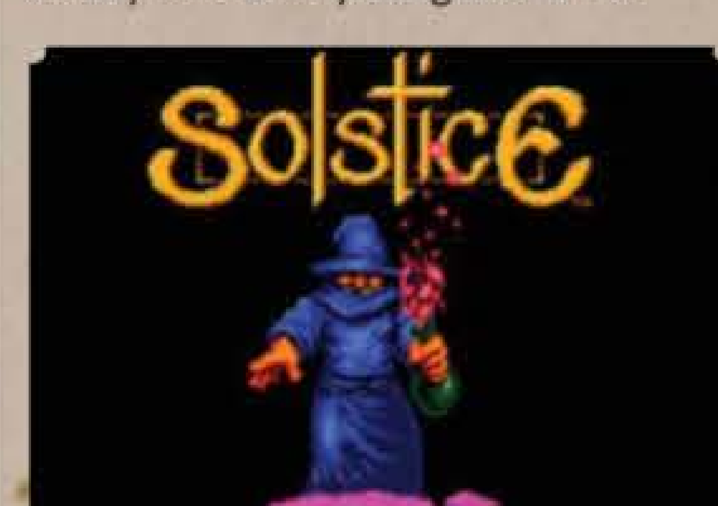
So was it difficult to develop isometric games for the NES?
I was so short of memory that the black area on the screen was used to store variables. In Spectrum terms I set the attribute to black and used the pixel memory as RAM. Also, due to the NES being character-based with limited sprites the masking was very challenging. Note that the Commodore 64 had very few isometric games.

It sounds challenging. What gameplay benefits did isometric offer that made you persevere?
Isometric was indeed very challenging and that's what made the game unique. Nobody had ever played or even seen any kind of 3D game on an NES. The obvious gameplay advantage was that you could have puzzles in three dimensions.

Commercially, how successful was the game?
Extremely. It took Software Creations from a ten-man company to a 50-man company.

Did you ever speak to the Stampers about *Solstice*?
We showed Chris and Tim an early version of the game and Chris's comment was that he wouldn't have believed it was possible if he hadn't seen it with his own eyes. He was amazed at the fact that an isometric game could be done in any form. He did ask why we went to all the trouble when there was good money to be made from much simpler games. I also remember him explaining that they withheld *Knight Lore* for a few months because they had other games in the pipeline that would suffer if it was released earlier.

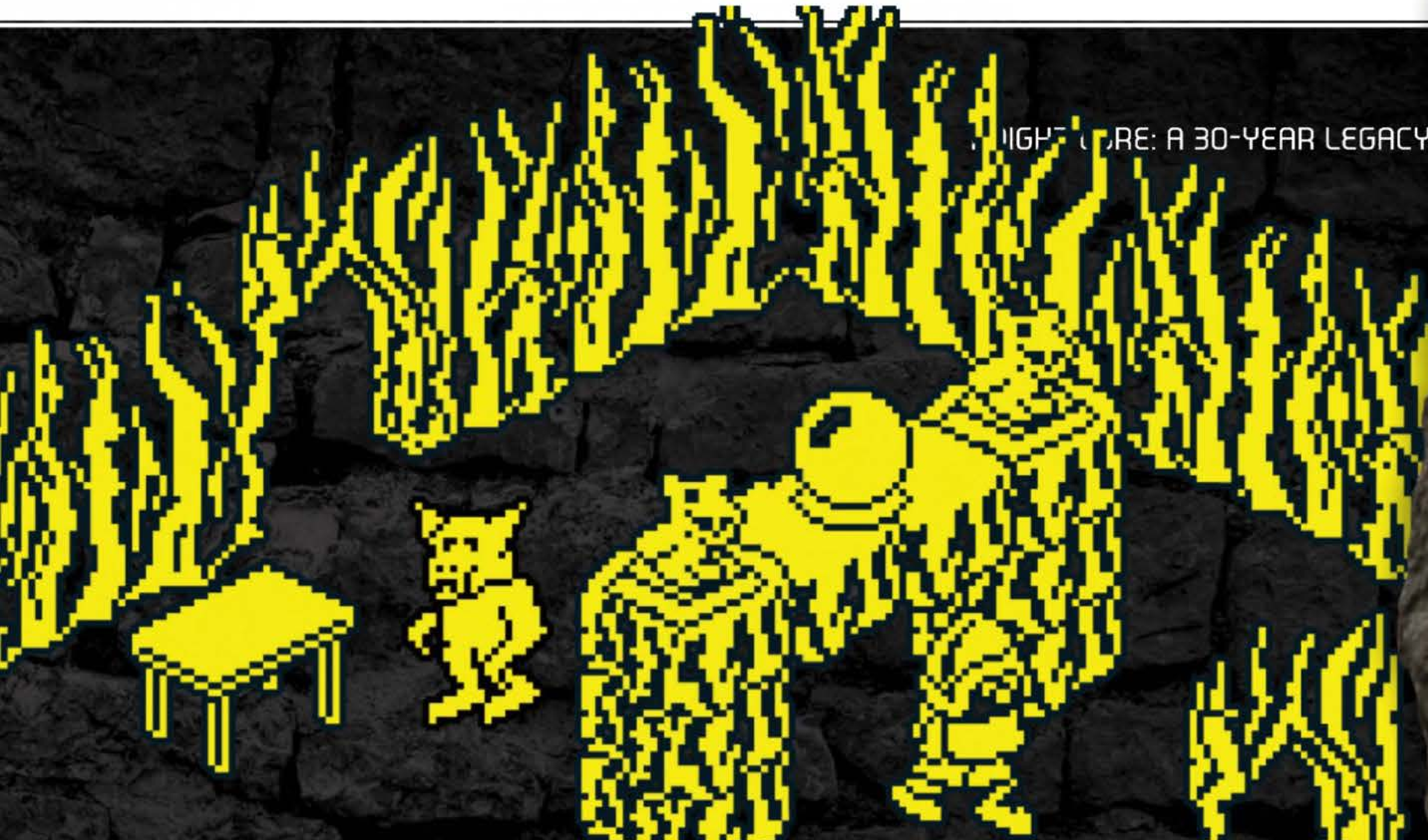
We understand the Stampers could get serious when it came to business. Were they not bothered about *Solstice* being similar to their earlier titles?
The Stampers were great blokes. Chris was very easy going but Tim was the one who'd play hardball. They never had a problem with *Solstice*. They were far too busy making money to worry about anything like that.







» [Amstrad CPC] *Nosferatu The Vampyre* proved that even arty-farty horror flicks could be licensed.





» [Spectrum] Bo Jangeborg's brilliant *Fairlight* attracted its own set of fans.



> **"We thought that creating a good game was all we had to worry about"**
> Juan Delcan

Classy titles like *La Abadia Del Crimen* and *Head Over Heels* pushed isometric games forward, both in terms of visuals and gameplay, but it's impossible to deny the initial impact and lasting influence of *Knight Lore*. It really was a game changer and you could argue that almost every isometric title released in the past 30 years – everything from *Civilization II* and *Populous* to *Syndicate* and *UFO: Enemy Unknown* – has at least some Filmation DNA in its make-up.

Ant Attack may have predated *Knight Lore*, but that game's 'Softsolid 3D' system never caught fire like Filmation did. The affable Sandy White is not bitter about that – at least not now. He says: "Putting aside feeling proprietorial about isometric 3D, which I'm quite sure I was at the time, I was fascinated to see how Ultimate approached the subject. It was like the teacher had come back into the room and said 'okay kids, this is how it's done'. They might as well have arrived in a flying saucer packing computing skills beyond the ken of mere Eighties man. Watching a walkthrough of *Knight Lore* on YouTube I still find myself thinking 'I wonder how they did that?' It is mostly built on black, presumably to save processor time. This to me seems like a brave design decision, but it totally works as your eye quickly makes up the rest. At the time this seemed like cheating. Today it seems like genius."

For Sandy though, the key to success was not just visual trickery but good game design in general: "If I had to choose one word to describe Ultimate games, *Knight Lore* being no exception, it would be 'balance'. So many games at the time would be based on some clever graphics routine – naming no names – and be lacking in gameplay. Ultimate succeeded in balancing one against the other, to a degree of perfection."

So here's to 30 years of *Knight Lore*. May its legacy live on for many years to come. ★

A MOMENT WITH...



» Jason with the Altair 8800, as seen on *The IT Crowd*.





» There is a wealth of machines on show at the museum, from old favourites to real rarities.



» There's always stuff to play on at the museum…

Jason Fitzpatrick

Paul Drury talks to Jason Fitzpatrick, director of the Centre For Computing History in Cambridge

Who is Jason Fitzpatrick?

Jason founded the Centre For Computing History in 2006, using his own private collection of computers and consoles as a beginning. Since then, the organisation has grown steadily in size and stature and in August 2013 it found a permanent home in Cambridge, open to the public all year round. See **www.computinghistory.org.uk** for details.

What prompted you to set up the Centre For Computing History?

Once computers have outlived their useful life, they become bin fodder and if we weren't careful, the origins of computing could be lost. We wanted to preserve these machines and keep them working. They've played such an important part in our lives over the last 40-odd years.

How many machines have you accumulated so far?

We have over 850 computers and consoles here and that doesn't include duplicates or close variations of machines.

Impressive! Tell us about some of the rarities in the collection.

We have an Elliott 903 from 1966. It has no microprocessor, just transistors… 2,500 odd of them! We've got an Altair 8800, which really kick-started the home computer revolution. It's also the machine that sits behind Moss in *The IT Crowd*. We supply the equipment for that show and people love to come and stroke it [laughs].

How do you manage to acquire such incredibly rare machines?

Well, take for example our Acorn Phoebe. It was the last product they were developing before they went bust. It had been kicking around under this guy's desk for years so he donated it to us. Turns out there are only two of these in the world and ours is the only working one!

We see you also have a huge archive of magazines, design documents, peripherals and even company badges. Do you see the whole culture around computers and consoles as important as the machines themselves?

Of course, and that's why the collection is as wide as it is. The people that love these machines adore everything about them. No one imagined when they called them 'personal computers' just how personal the relationship would be.

We're here to bring the original development disks and music score from the C64 game *Super Pipeline 2*, donated by Andy Walker. Is this the kind of thing you're looking for?

Yes, more than anything else now. There aren't many machines we haven't already got, so we're turning our attention to artefacts from developing hardware and software. And games of course!



» The ultra-rare Acorn Phoebe, one of only two known to exist

Yes, we see you always have games to play at the museum and you host regular retro gaming nights.

We aren't just about archiving and cataloguing. We have a bunch of people here who really love this stuff and a good percentage of them are gamers. The gaming nights bring in a wide range of people and that helps us to build up our knowledge, too.

You put on Raspberry Pi workshops as well. Are you trying to get kids coding again like in the Eighties?

Education is a strong part of what we do during the week. We get schools in and sit kids down and teach them how to program on the old BBC Micros. It's lovely and so immediate. We tell them they can do this on modern technology and show them the Raspberry Pi. We want to inspire the next generation of programmers and hackers.

How can our readers support the Centre?

Come and visit us! The main display is always up and very hands-on. If you have a specific request for a machine you'd like to see, drop us an email and we'll try and get it ready for when you come! Donations are fantastic and if your readers are local to us, they can come and help out at the museum. We're always looking for volunteers.

The Making of Ballblazer

In 1984, a newcomer released its first two games. This company was owned by movie-mogul George Lucas. Mike Bevan talks roto-snapping and plasmorb dribbling with the designer of one of those famous titles



» The Lucasfilm Games Group, with David Levine and Peter Langston second and third from left respectively

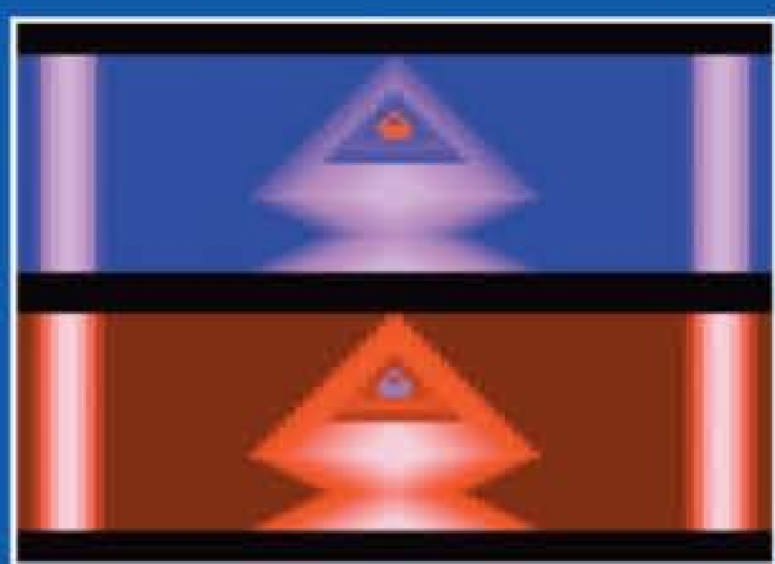
Chatting to David Levine, it crosses our mind that he's someone we've wanted to talk to for a very long time. Back in 2007 we were fortunate enough to interview David Fox, designer of *Rescue On Fractalus!*, one of two important debut titles for Lucasfilm Games, the forerunner of LucasArts. We were hoping to follow our 'Making Of' feature with a companion piece on the second game, David's *Ballblazer*, and exchanged a number of emails and interview requests, but he remained hard to pin down. But with last year's sad demise of LucasArts as an active videogame developer, we contacted David again and to our surprise, he agreed to tell his story. Clearly moved by parent company Disney "closing down the shop", he granted us a rare opportunity to learn more about the early pioneering days at the legendary company that a visionary George Lucas had set up in 1982.

Ballblazer and *Rescue On Fractalus!* were instrumental in not only launching the famous developer, but changing the way we looked at interactive computer entertainment products. Each presented a very unique virtual world, in the case of *Fractalus*, a real-time mountain landscape rendered by a stunning fractal graphic engine, and with *Ballblazer*, a futuristic 3D sporting arena incorporating incredibly lifelike physics. Both were the product of a new approach to game design, one that relied heavily on R&D, experimentation and pushing the capabilities of the contemporary hardware to its limits.

"A co-worker had gone to work for Lucasfilm, a fellow named Tom Duff who was later one of the famous Pixar scientists," David begins. "He came to our shop in between New York Tech and Lucasfilm and after he'd gone there I contacted him and asked if there were any openings. He mentioned that there was a Games Group starting within the computer division and that Peter Langston, who I also knew, was in charge of it. I met up with Peter at the SIGGRAPH [computer graphics conference] and that's how I came to join Lucasfilm."

"We knew the general scenario, which was that Atari and Lucasfilm together were interested in seeing what would come from the application of computer science to computer games, and our platform of choice was the Atari 800/5200 (the home computer and console versions respectively). They were the best choice at the time, in my opinion far superior to the Commodore [64] in terms of audio capabilities, and they had a good complement of hardware assistance towards the graphics in terms of specialised chips, so we were quite happy to work with them."

From the start David's intention was to create a new kind of two-player experience. "The inspiration for *Ballblazer* was the air hockey tables of the day," he reveals. I had absolutely no interest in one-player games – sure, you could play air hockey by yourself but it wouldn't be much fun." The forward-thinking attitude at Lucasfilm was definitely a positive environment for realising



» [Atari 8-bit] The colourful introductory sequence was prefaced by an animated Lucasfilm logo.



» [Atari 8-bit] The AI droid makes a comeback with a two-point goal. Higher points are awarded when scoring from further away.

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** ATARI/EPYX (US) ACTIVISION (EUROPE)
» **DEVELOPER:** LUCASFILM GAMES
» **RELEASED:** 1984
» **PLATFORM:** VARIOUS
» **GENRE:** SPORTS

RIFFOLOGY

Peter Langston explains Ballblazer's AI

Games Group leader Peter Langston contributed code for *Ballblazer*'s AI 'droids', which players could practice against before taking on a human opponent, as well as the complex algorithm for generating the semi-randomised in-game music, a routine he termed 'riffology'. "It was easy to make the practice droids very tough to beat, even on a 6502 processor; since they were software they had very fast reflexes," recalls Peter. "The problem was how to make them more like the human players and more fun to compete with. I did that by building in varying degrees of distraction. I made them lose focus at random intervals (more or less frequently depending on the level you wanted them to play at), so the player could slip past them or get the orb away from them, or they might overshoot their planned trajectory. That way you could tune them so that they gave you a tough battle, but you still had a chance."

"As for the music, I had a back-story idea about there being an anthem that consisted of contributions from all the great *Ballblazer* champions of the past (the 'Masterblazers') and I got a number of famous musicians that I happened to be friends with to contribute musical phrases (riffs) to this 'Song Of The Grid'... I then made a simulation of an improvising soloist whose improvisations combined those riffs in musically pleasing ways." At the time Peter noted: "One reviewer, an eminent jazz player Pat Metheny, said it sounded like John Coltrane did it. I think that's my best compliment so far."





such a radical concept. "We basically had free reign," says David. "Our mission was simply to make landmark entries into the field; the existence of the company was dependent on wowing the world with what we did. Our objective wasn't difficult to achieve because we had the ideas and were given the time and space to execute them."

"What I set out to do was to try to establish a connection between two players and a mediated virtual physical environment," continues David. "I wanted to fully maximise the capacity of the machine in order to realise it. So it was an experiment to see what [the Atari] could do..." The fact that the company was specifically against developing any products based on its *Star Wars* films also turned out to be beneficial to creativity. "It opened the door to everything else," says David, "There were some *Star Wars* themes that came to mind that were sort of obvious in brainstorming sessions and ideas for games, but in truth the technology couldn't support the scenario of doing a *Star Wars* game anyway, so we were better off with an open-ended charter..."

> **"The inspiration for Ballblazer was the air hockey tables of the day"**
> David Levine

"The first step was to create a visual world that had rich enough, subtle responses to convey the physicality, and I was able to get the Atari to produce this dual grid. The idea was to convey to the player that they were in motion on a two-dimensional surface in terms of the two degrees of freedom that they had. Technically the term is an interferometer, which is a scientific instrument that is extremely sensitive to subtlety. The two-dimensional grid is precisely that, a two-dimensional interferometer that conveys directly to the user that they are moving in these two degrees of freedom. Everything about *Ballblazer*, the grid, the ships, the perspective, the physics mostly; was designed to be something that was completely self-consistent and rich to the point that the idiosyncratic, unique physics of the environment would emerge."

In terms of gameplay, *Ballblazer* was akin to a cross between air hockey and a futuristic version of soccer, with each player controlling a frictionless, hovering craft called a Rotofoil. Matches involved chasing down a glowing ball, the 'plasmorb', and capturing it in the force-field on the front of their craft, then heading down-field towards the 'goal beams' into which they had to fire it at high velocity to score. It was a neatly-executed concept, the chequer-board grid conveying a wonderful sense of motion 'into' the screen and the near-perfect physics allowing players to perfectly control their shots, or even to ricochet the

plasmorb into the goal from the grid edges. In short, *Ballblazer* was a massive evolution from the physics-derived titles like *Pong* and *Breakout* just a few years earlier.

One clever game mechanic that David hit upon early on was 'roto-snapping' – a subtlety that assured that players were always able to seek out their objective, even when experiencing frantic tussles over the plasmorb. "Once the ball gets captured in your force-field it finds its way to whichever side of your ship was closest to the goal, and your ship simply automatically turned to face it," David explains. "It was that particular realisation that I had that made it work, because you are always following the ball… and the ball seeks the goal. If the machine had the horsepower to do so we could have allowed the user to turn at arbitrary angles instead of just 45 degrees, but again that was a limitation of the hardware."

David also reveals how the familiar diamond shape of the Rotofoils came after a lot of experimentation. "The primary criteria for the Rotofoils was that they would scale," he says. "I needed to choose a shape that would scale with as much subtlety as the grid moved, because the ability to scale is vital to maintaining that high degree of connection that you have so that you can 'feel' the game. As they scale you'll see that the angled line is stair-stepped in the Atari version, as the ship gets bigger the stair-steps get bigger, and there's not much we could do about that given the tech. However the corners of the ships were always precisely where they needed to be… those are the things that tell your senses and your brain exactly where these ships are and how they are moving."

Interestingly, there was one person who wasn't overly happy with the available ships. Quite an important person in fact… "George [Lucas] was kind of disappointed that we couldn't have other options for ships," continues David. "He envisioned characters and other things and I actually overrode his wishes because my vision of it as a sport was predicated on matched equipment – two people with the same gear meant it was strictly a skill battle between players and we didn't want any differences in their gear, but a more true reason behind that was that there's only so many shapes of ships that would scale and fulfil that criteria. I tried variations with parts of the ships upside-down and rearranged but what we settled on was this shape and different colours and fortunately the fantasy was filled out by the artists in terms of what they really represented." George Lucas's visual effects house Industrial Light and Magic also built a model of a Rotofoil, which was eventually featured on the game's cover. "We were absolutely thrilled with that," admits David. "ILM took the drawings of the Rotofoil models as they were visualised by our 2D artists and designed a three-dimensional model, and even tried to figure out how they might work. We had great people working on it and were really fortunate to have all that talent at our disposal."



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

RESCUE ON FRACTALUS! (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: ATARI 400/800 & VARIOUS
YEAR: 1984

KORONIS RIFT
SYSTEM: ATARI 400/800 & VARIOUS
YEAR: 1985

THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND
SYSTEM: PC, AMIGA, MAC & VARIOUS
YEAR: 1990

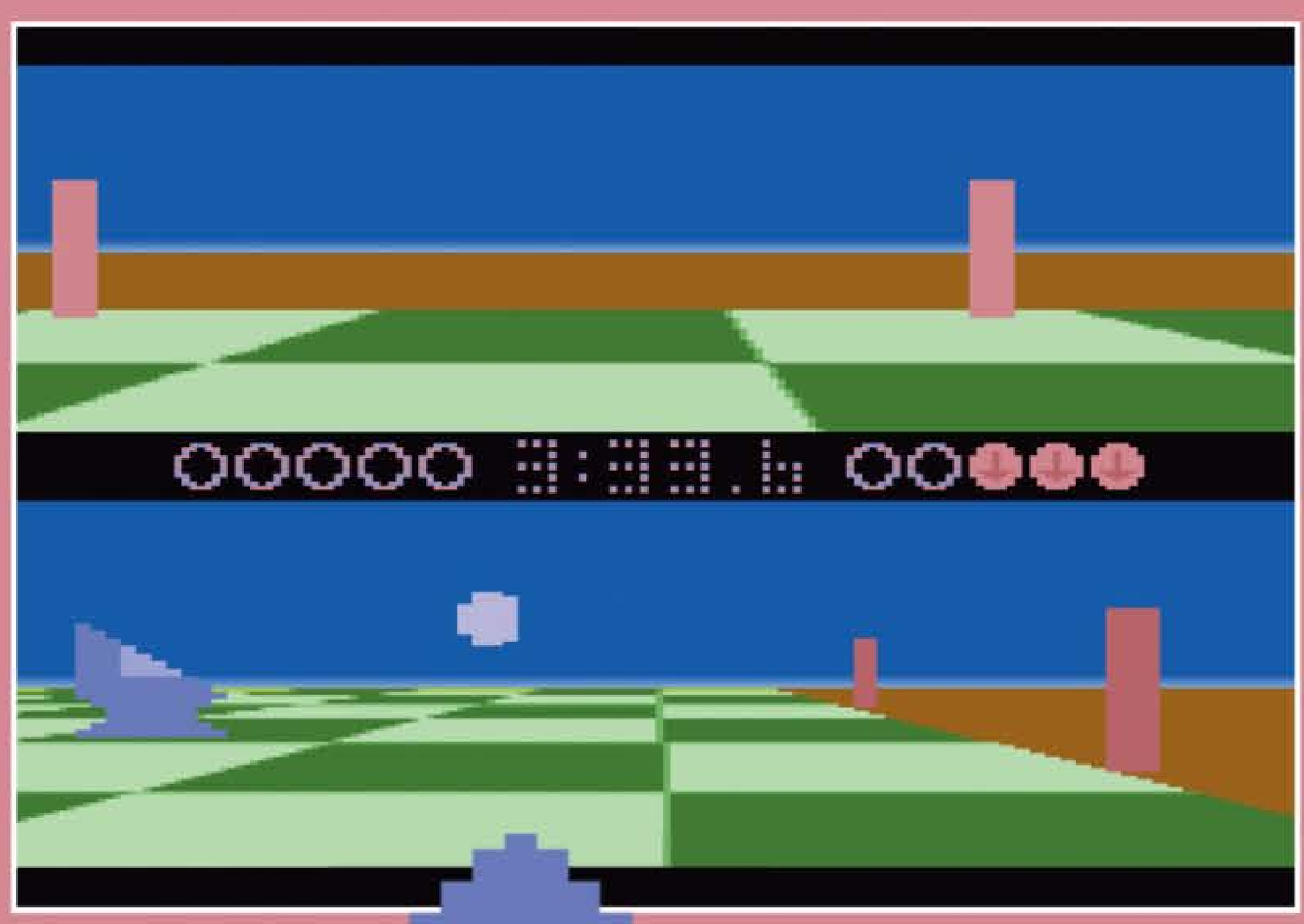


» [Atari 7800] Tussling for possession at the start of the match.



» [Atari 7800] The Atari 7800 version has improved 3D scaling and a much smoother look to the Rotofoils.

> "We were really fortunate to have all that talent at our disposal"
> David Levine



» [Atari 8-bit] With practice it's possible to dribble the plasmorb by holding down the fire button.



» Industrial Light & Magic's Rotofoil model featured heavily on *Ballblazer*'s packaging.

David confirms that there was a lot of tweaking of the game engine to produce that perfect 'feel'. "The physics were everything," he confesses. "There was a lot of tuning and I sat and played the game and would sit there swinging from side-to-side trying to hit the goal or get it just outside the goalposts, putting in the mathematical correction tables to account for perspective. We got feedback from everybody on the team, but basically it was just me staying up all night sitting there just playing and tuning it…

"There's another concept that we brought with both these games, which was that they each had a distinct mathematical model that was separate from the graphic rendering, and that was unheard of before. In other games the world of the screen was also the model – the pixels and the world was the same thing. In our games there was a mathematical model that was interpreted and rendered by the graphics. The music and sound helped as well, because it was all synchronised to the action." David also points out how dissatisfied he was with the conversions, as well as later sequels like *Ballblazer Champions*. "The other versions are simply not representative of the game," he laments. "The only version that was actually the same game was the Atari 7800 version because they took my physics code and just made less 'jaggies' [pixellation] in the graphics. Really, either you played the Atari version or you don't know the game." He expresses his frustration that the industry never really built on the genre that he terms the 'computer mediated sport'. "With the control devices of today there's a lot of potential, but the only place I've seen it touched on is with spatial gesturing games on the Wii. If you think about what was done with an eight position joystick, it's not about the controllers, the graphics or the processors because we did it all 30 years ago."

Finally, David reveals that he had been working on another 3D game for Lucasfilm after *Ballblazer*, one that was never completed. "I was trying to do something a bit more ambitious – I had a 3D field similar to the grid but spatial representing motions in three dimensions. I didn't want to do another sporting game, but it was a skill-based game in a physical environment. George came in to look at it and said 'Oh another one of these games…' He wasn't interested in the kind of game I wanted to make, he was interested in the interactive story, and I've all the respect in the world for him – he's a master mythologist. But it became clear at the point that Lucasfilm was not the place where my notion of what computer-based entertainment was would be. With LucasArts closing down I would be happy if Disney took the idea and turned it into something like *Tron* – that's conceptually closer to it than anything has been – in terms of a physical sport played inside the virtual world. Because it's not about the fantasy or the future sport, it's about the experience and putting you in an environment that is rich, accurate and dynamic enough physically that you feel it…" *

THE FUTURE IS NOW
More futuristic sports games to try



DISCS OF TRON 1983
■ Based on a sequence from Disney's groundbreaking film, *Discs Of Tron* was an equally innovative arcade game, with players bouncing discs around a glowing playfield to defeat their opponents. A later Neo Geo arcade game, *Windjammers*, used a similar mechanic, although with a top-down view.



SPEEDBALL 1988
■ The Bitmap Brothers went all cyberpunk on us with this violent futuristic sports title, drawing on elements of ice hockey and dodgeball. The fact that players were awarded points for injuring opponents alongside actually scoring goals led to frequent midfield ruckuses, and frequent power-ups also added to the fun.



SHUFFLEPUCK CAFE 1989
■ *Shufflepuck Café* was another title inspired by the noble pastime of air hockey, with a bit of the cantina scene from *Star Wars* thrown in for good measure. With some well-realised physics, it used a mouse-based control system to control your bat and 'flick' the puck up the screen at your alien-looking opponents.



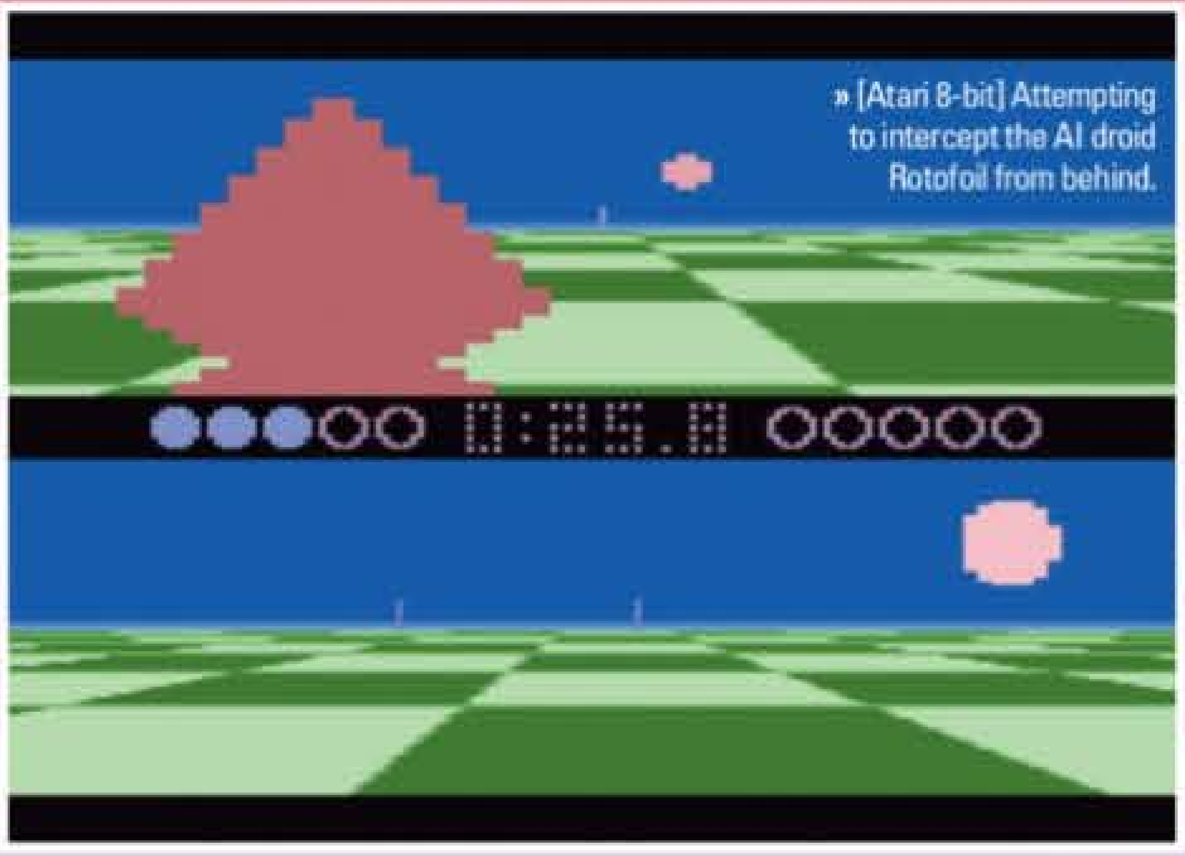
PURPLE SATURN DAY 1989
■ This space oddity from *Captain Blood* developer Exxos presented four very different 'events' that certainly lived up to the name in being very mauve. These included racing around Saturn's rings and participating in a fast-paced 3D arena shooter with a very similar graphic engine to *Ballblazer*…



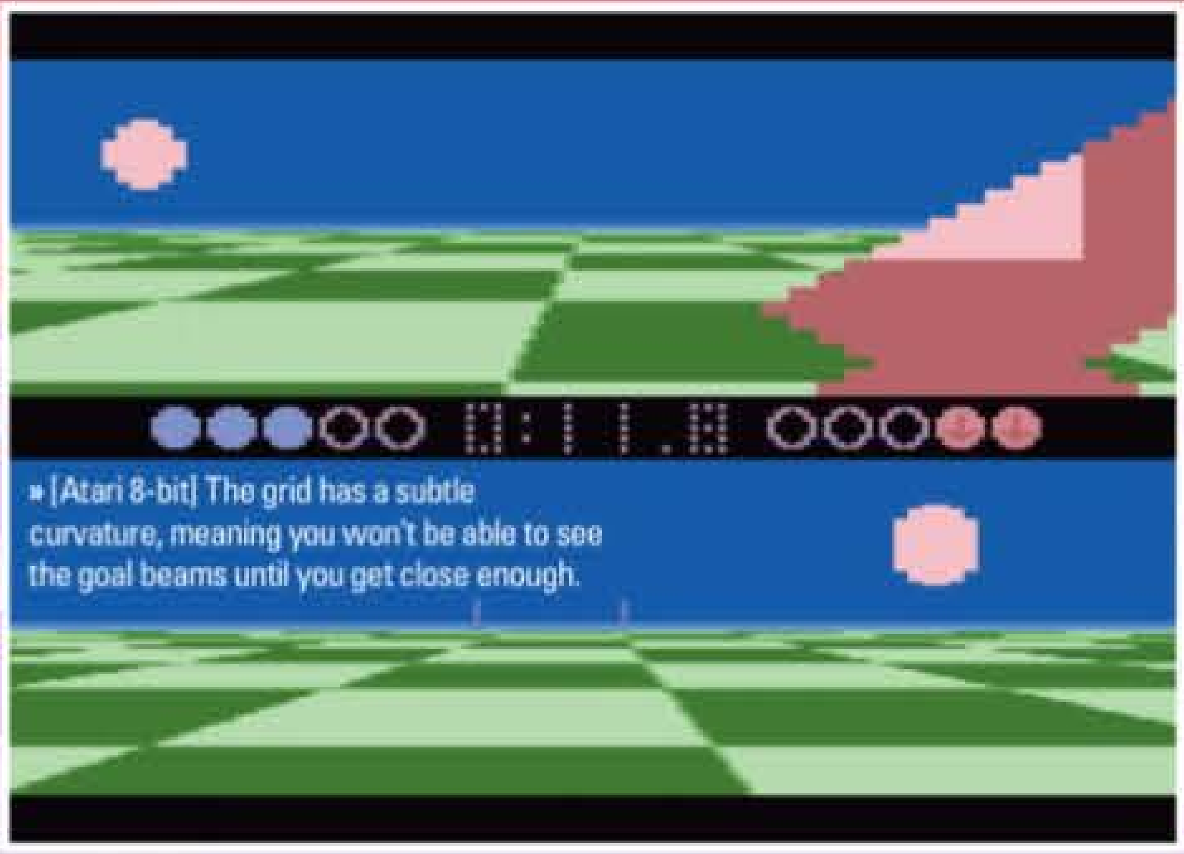
WIPEOUT 1995
■ If you were trying to apply the spirit of *Ballblazer* to a racing game, you might well come up with something along the lines of *WipEout*. Inspired by the likes of *Mario Kart* and *F-Zero*, Psygnosis's famous PlayStation release featured sleek futuristic vehicles, thrilling neon-strewn courses and a banging techno soundtrack.



COSMIC SMASH 2001
■ Released in the arcades and for the Dreamcast by Sega, *Cosmic Smash* was an elegant blend of squash and the classic Atari game *Breakout*, with cel-shaded graphics. Players had to destroy a number of blocks in an enclosed room with their racquet-wielding avatar using smashes, lobs and trick shots.



» [Atari 8-bit] Attempting to intercept the AI droid Rotofoil from behind.



» [Atari 8-bit] The grid has a subtle curvature, meaning you won't be able to see the goal beams until you get close enough.



THE STORY OF STRIDER

Strider turns 25 this year. To celebrate, Capcom has released its first new Strider game in 15 years. Darran Jones swings his Cypher and speaks to key staff behind the series



It's been 25 years since Strider Hiryu first swung his Cypher sword and made that dizzying run down an exploding mountainside that captivated all who saw it. Since then he's been something of a recluse, using his ninja skills to hide in the shadows and only occasionally coming out to shine, but otherwise content to simply cameo in a number of other Capcom games, particularly versus fighters where his insane ninja skills are put to extremely good use.

To celebrate his 25th anniversary, Capcom has just unleashed a brand new game, *Strider*, which aims to appeal to his hardcore fan base, while hopefully ensnaring a number of new gamers who never had the opportunity to experience his original adventures.

"I have never felt that *Strider* became successful," reveals original creator Kouichi 'Isuke' Yotsui, when we ask him about the popularity of the ninja he helped create in 1989. "However, while we were making *Strider*, we always felt that we were in middle of creating a very entertaining game."

He's right as well. *Strider* is an incredibly enjoyable game, one that pushed graphical boundaries when it was first released. Taking on the role of Strider Hiryu, your aim was to bring down the evil dictator Grandmaster Meio, armed with just your Cypher laser sword and your insane agility. ▶



» [Arcade] This section of Strider's last game tests gravity and your reflexes. Wimps need not apply.



“We always felt that we were in middle of creating a very entertaining game”

Kouichi Yotsui



» [Arcade] Yes we've shown a variation of this screenshot so many times, but it remains an amazing gaming moment.

"We had trouble keeping the amount of data under what was available"
Kouichi Yotsui



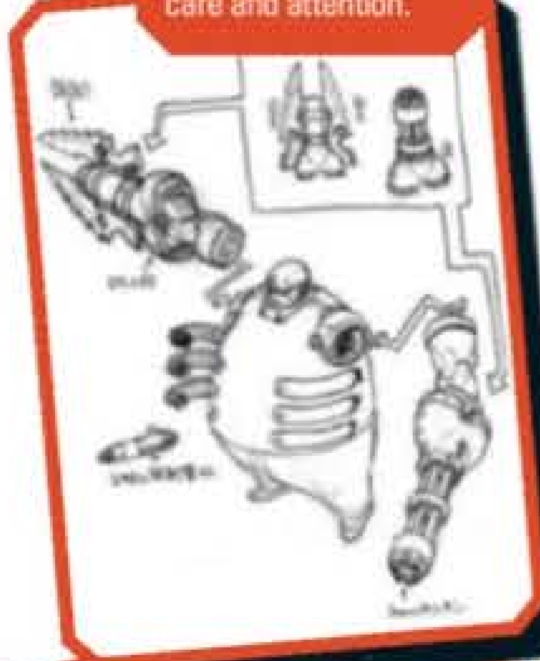
» [Arcade] Hiryu even manages to look cool when he dies.

▶ Hiryu could swing up gantries, run down mountainsides, leap huge chasms and even operate in zero gravity. He was quite simply magnificent, but he also caused issues for Yotsui, who struggled with the technology limitations of the time. "We had trouble keeping the amount of data under what was available," he admits. "Hiryu's various action movement data had taken up more than half of the whole graphic data amount space."

And yet many would argue that it's worth it. Watching Hiryu in motion as he climbed walls, sliced his way through enemies and nimbly avoided enemies was mesmerising, and it's pleasing to see that new developer Double Helix Games has managed to retain his deadly grace for its reboot. As far as Yotsui was concerned, Strider's graceful animation was always the thing that drove his game. "It was the most important thing," he explains to us. "This is an action game, therefore the player should be able to enjoy it by just controlling Hiryu. We tried to make players be entertained by just making Hiryu run, jump or go through unknown environments. By adding movement such as jumping, running, sliding, clinging and climbing it will be even more entertaining. We felt that defeating unexpected enemies that appear in front of you by using all those movements would give the players extreme pleasure. To enable all these cornerstones, Hiryu's agility had to be the most important [thing] of all."

In addition to Hiryu's impressive athleticism, it was the game world itself and its weird and wonderful bosses that really helped separate it from its arcade peers. *Strider* had dramatic set pieces that ranged from running down an exploding mountainside to hitching rides on the backs of various dinosaurs, while his travels took him from the snowy slopes of Siberia to the heart of a floating battleship. Variety was the spice of life in *Strider*, and this was none more apparent than when facing off against its insanely nutty bosses. "We created multi-cultural and unfamiliar looking enemies to surprise players," continues Yotsui when quizzed about *Strider*'s exotic art design. "Creating these enemies was also important to expand the world within the game."

And what magnificent creations those enemies were. Robotic gorillas, brash Amazonians, metallic dinosaurs and an airborne pirate all vied for your attention, while even the lowliest of enemies felt alien and unique. You never forget the time you flew around the anti-gravity boss, desperately pummelling the fire button before you're flung into a nearby wall, or watching a group of Russian dignitaries transform into the hammer and sickle-wielding Ouroboros. It's a testament to their timeless design that so many have been included in Double Helix Games's reboot, but which is Yotsui's favourite? "I like the visual style of Lago Mechanic, the abilities of Anti-Gravity Device, Mecha Pon's charm and the clever functions which Ouroboros has," he tells us, clearly warming to the subject. "I like Solo's coolness, Kuniang MA Team's beauty and the dignity which Grandmaster Meio has. Yes, it's safe to say I like all of them."



» He might be a sub-boss, but he's still created with lots of care and attention.

Gamers agreed, and *Strider* became a big success for Capcom, no doubt helped by the Manga comic that had been released in 1988 (in collaboration with Moto Kikaku) and the 1989 NES game that followed a few months after Yotsui's arcade game. The NES game is quite interesting because it's a completely different beast to Yotsui's effort, playing to the strengths of the host hardware but clearly losing out as a result.

You still play as Strider Hiryu, but the pace of the game is greatly diminished, making him feel slightly less effective as a result. The story is also different to the arcade game, and a little more detailed due to the nature of the platform it's on, making it more in line with the story told in Tatsumi Wada's original manga anthology. There are Metroidvania-like design aspects to the game as well, with the ability to return to previous levels once new power-ups have been acquired. While it's a fun addition to the *Strider* canon, it ▶



» [NES] While the NES game is an enjoyable adventure it's not a patch on the superb arcade game.

THE MISSING STRIDER
The game that Grin was making

It's widely known that Capcom had commissioned Grin to make a game about Strider as far back as 2008. What isn't known is what type of game it was going to be. After extensive digging an anonymous source was able to confirm a few things about the title.

"Grin made the deal with *Strider* overlapping *Bionic Commando* before anyone knew how *Bionic Commando* would be received. At that time I think that relations with Capcom were good. I guess they started to outline a new project thinking *Bionic Commando* would be a hit." We've thought this ever since Grin was revealed as the developer, as *Strider* would have fit perfectly into its two-game template.

Our source goes on to reveal the following about *Strider*'s gameplay. "It took many different turns. First we did a super abstract design that was completely unique. That was the first take. Then the project landed in the hands of Grin Barcelona. From that point I have absolutely no idea."

Capcom went on to approach Grin with other smaller titles, including mentioning *Mega Man*, but the ideas were eventually dropped, the *Bionic Commando Rearmed* team was separated and Grin itself closed down a year later.







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STRIDER: THE DIRECTOR'S COMMENTARY

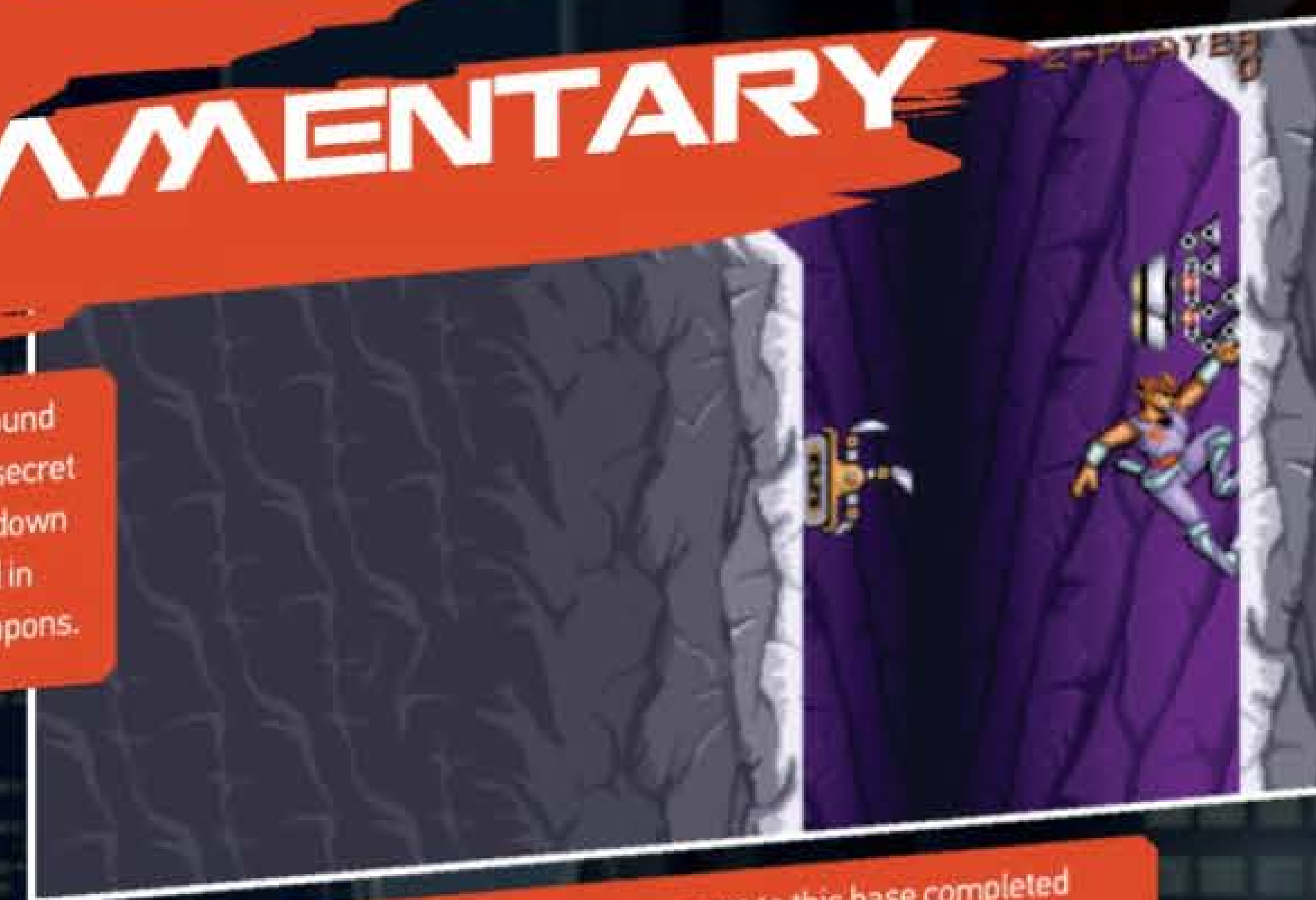
Kouichi Yotsui tells us the story and gameplay mechanics behind Strider's iconic second level



1 The entire Eurasian continent is under Grandmaster Meio's control. After completing the mission at Kazah Federation's capital city, Hiryu is trying to escape from the continent by running through the whole of Siberia while Siberian wolves attack him.

2 Hiryu manages to escape the wolves by running into an underground tunnel. Hiryu discovers this tunnel is in fact Grandmaster Meio's secret base. Most of the weapon manufacturers who brought Meio's anger down on them and were sent to Siberia are transported here to be engaged in developing new types of weapons. Mecha Pon is one of their test weapons.





3 One of the manufacturing teams that was sent to this base completed these devices and the Anti-Gravity Device. By using the Anti-Gravity Device, Meio managed to float the new moon, The Third Moon, which made him very happy. It is said that this was the moment when the plan to burn down the whole living existence on Earth flashed into Meio's mind.



4 I am sure you have noticed that the Flying Mosqueman is the one who delivers items to the traitor Hiryu. This was a small harassment towards Meio by the manufacturers that were sent to Siberia.

5 This is the bounty hunter Solo. His powered armor is designed on the mosquito. Mosquitos existed on earth long before human beings were born. Back then they were already the most developed and completed (perfected) creatures. As long as they do not get swatted with a big clap! [Makes clapping noise]



6 Back then we were drawing *Strider*'s gaming map on pieces of paper using pencils. To draw this slope we had to stick so many papers together, and while doing this it made us scared. We started thinking, 'is sticking this many papers together really worth it for such a simple-minded and silly idea? Aren't we just going to become a laughingstock?'







7 In arcade games, the second level carries a very important rule. We have to make players who have learned the game's controls on the first level think, 'we want to see more of this game!' For that purpose, we added speedier-developed scenarios and more venturesome changes. The match between the players and us always gets settled on the second level.

8 While Hiryu was running through Siberia, he was chased by Kuniang MA Team's airship group and suffered a surprise attack. Hiryu flies between airships to fight them. The name Hiryu means 'Flying Dragon', so he flies freely in the sky and essentially becomes a dragon running across Siberia.





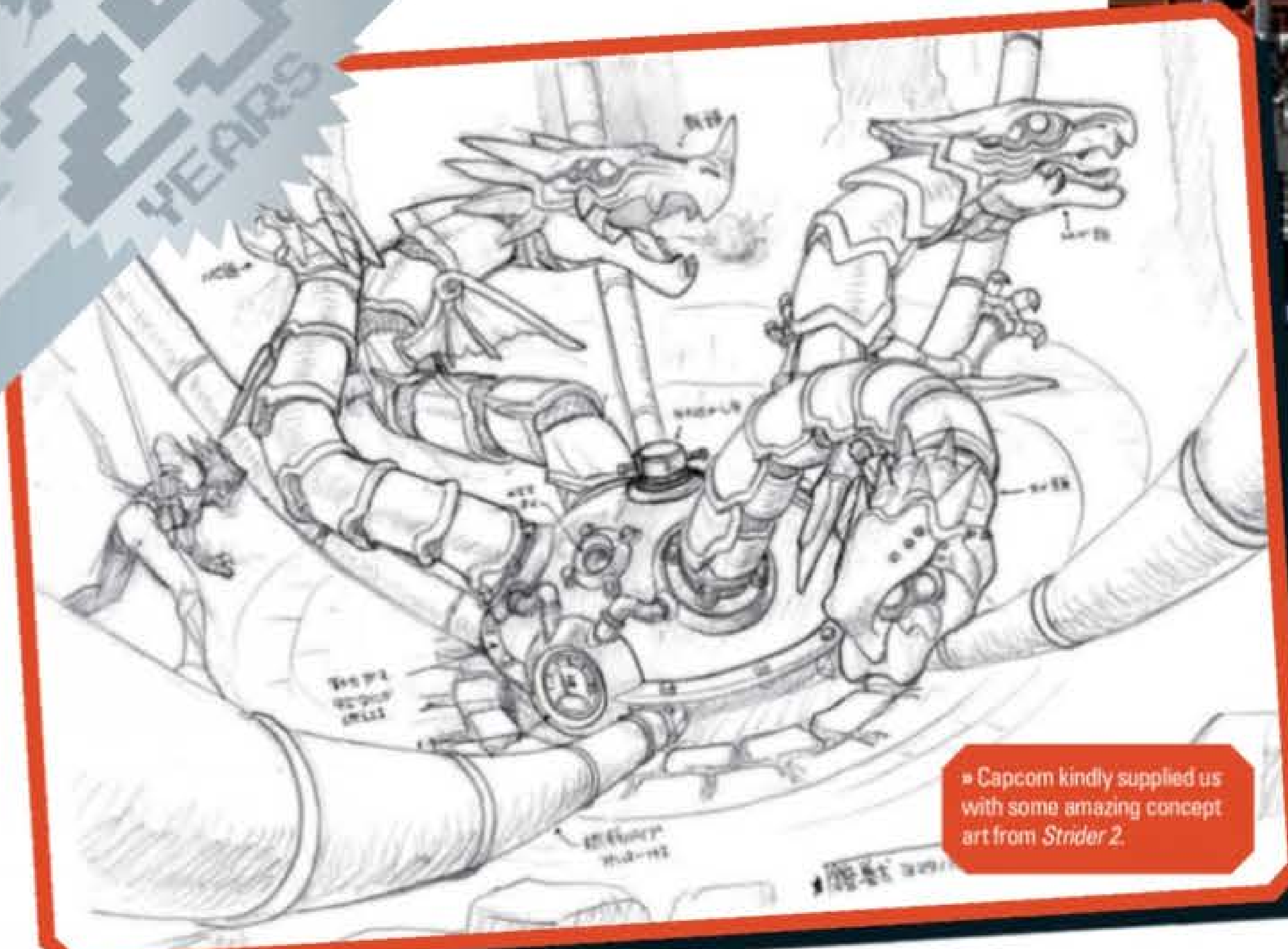
9 Hiryu is now at a super-high altitude and being pushed to his limits. He is invading the enemy's ship and taking it over. This was a real pleasure of mine, as this action scene originated from an old pirate movie!

10 Hiryu is fighting against enemies who have dance-like movements and perform beautiful Taijutsu (a sort of martial art). Kuniang MA Team, who are also sky pirates, know of Meio's flying battleship, Balrog, as they have been overpowered by it in the past.

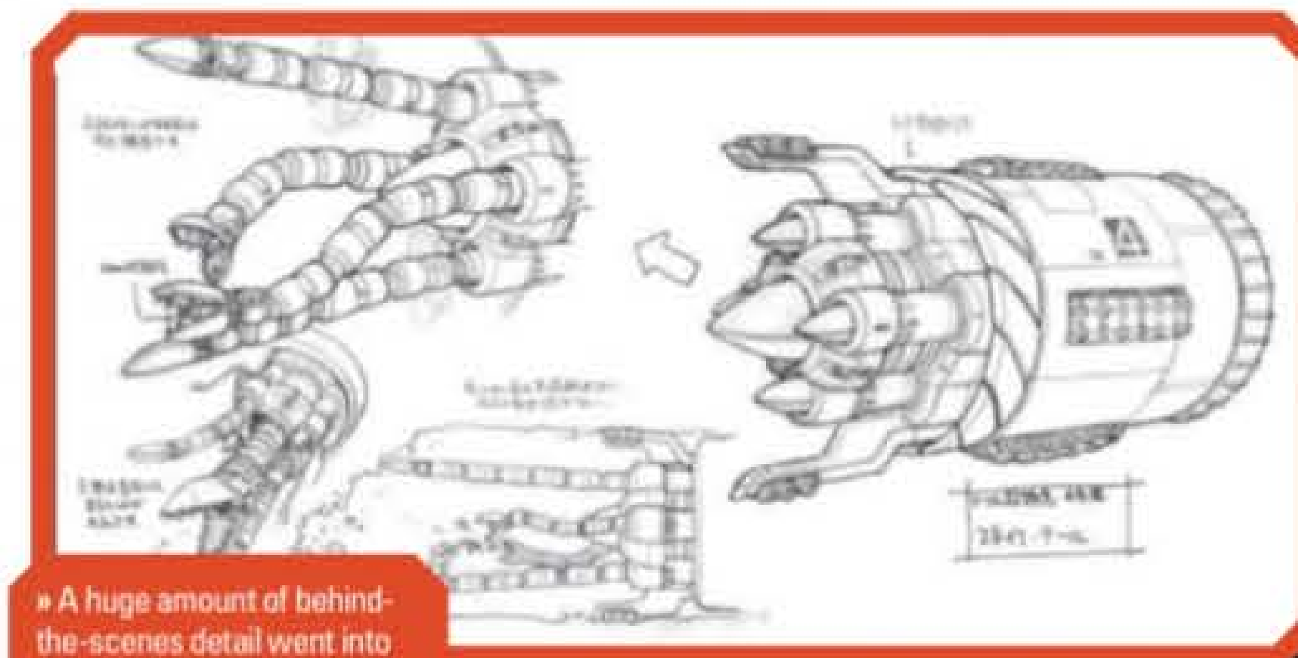




» [Mega Drive] *Strider II* is the one weak link in an otherwise solid chain.



» Capcom kindly supplied us with some amazing concept art from *Strider 2*.



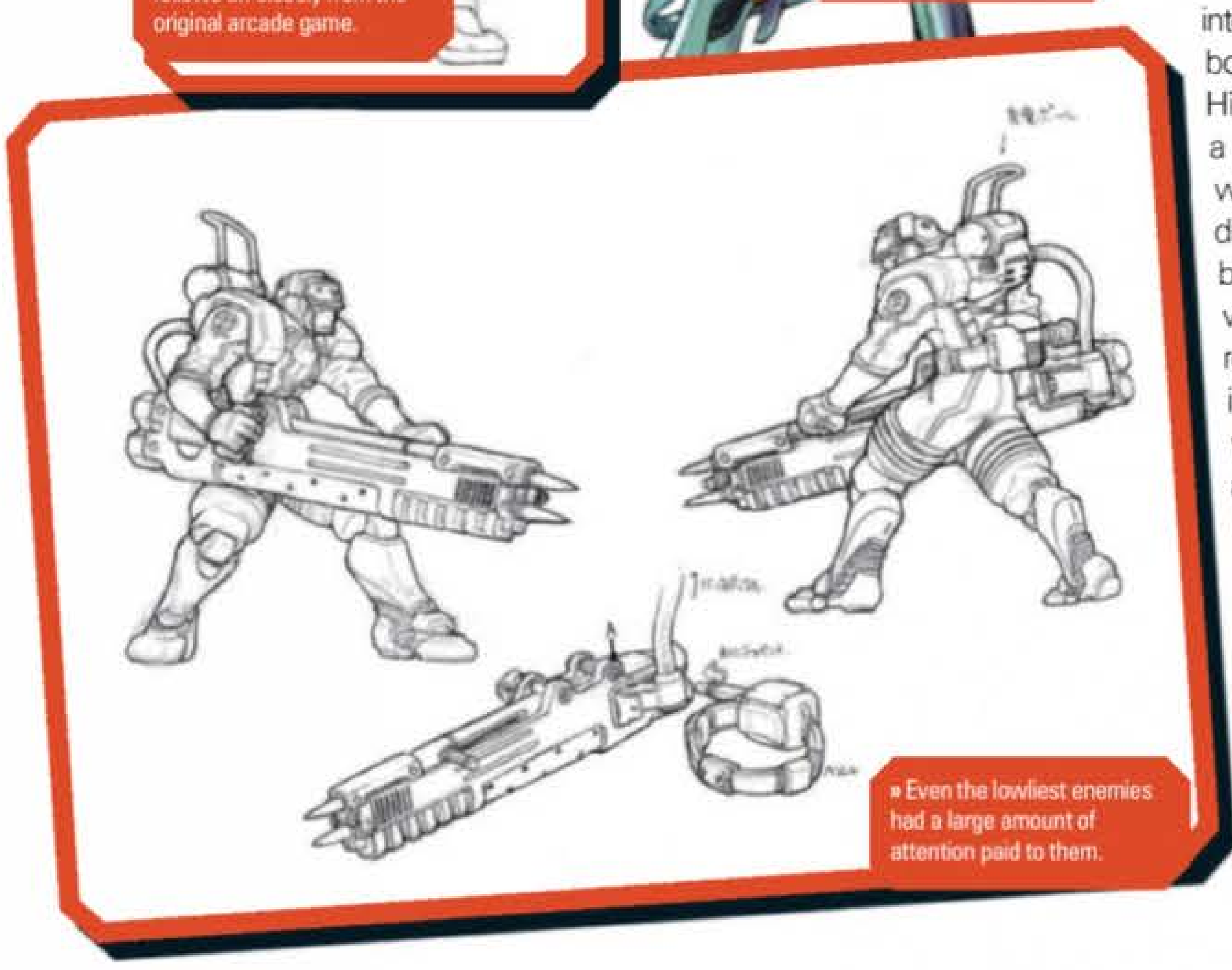
» A huge amount of behind-the-scenes detail went into the creation of enemies.



» The design of *Strider 2* follows on closely from the original arcade game.



» Solo returns in *Strider 2*, so he's been given a suitable upgrade over his first look.



» Even the lowliest enemies had a large amount of attention paid to them.

▶ lacks the grace and fluidity of Yotsui's game, a thing that becomes far more noticeable when using wall jumps or climbing. You never feel quite as in control of Hiryu as you do in the arcade outing, which takes away from the game. It's still a robust action game – something Capcom could turn out in its sleep during its NES period – but it pales in comparison to Yotsui's interpretation of the ninja.

Home conversions of the arcade game soon followed, with the majority of home computer versions being handled by US Gold, which passed coding duties to Tiertex. Sega did its own conversion of *Strider* for its Mega Drive and Master System, while the long-gestating PC Engine game (it was first announced in 1990 but released in 1994) featured animated cut-scenes, Red Book audio and a brand new level. Tiertex's conversions were hit and miss for the most part, with its 16-bit conversions fairing better, although it's impressive just how much of the original arcade game the various conversions could fit in. The Sharp X68000 is the clear winner, but was hardly a fair comparison due to its sheer amount of power and its actual cost (around £1,000).

Tiertex nevertheless managed to impress Capcom, and soon secured the rights to make a console and computer sequel, 1990's rather disappointing *Strider II*. Interestingly, it starred a brand new Strider, called Strider Hinjo, who now sported a gun in addition to his Cypher but could also turn into a laser-spewing robot when engaging bosses. He was otherwise identical to Strider Hiryu, with his own one-man crusade against a new superb villain. Chris Brunning, who worked on the home computer versions, did tell us the reason for the similarities between the two Striders. "The character was the same in the versions we did, just re-coloured," referring to the sprite used in Tiertex's arcade conversions. "That was an internal decision as far as I am aware." He goes on to reveal that there was no involvement from Capcom from a developer point of view, which may explain why it's just not in the same league as the arcade game that inspired it.

This wasn't the first time that Tiertex had made a non-computer sequel to a popular coin-op – *HKM: Human Killing Machine* was a sequel to *Street Fighter* – so we were keen to know if Chris and the rest of the team felt any pressure while working on the home sequel. "Not a great deal," he honestly tells us. "I believe it was only 'cult' popular really."

Strider II went on to receive decent scores on home computers, with the Spectrum version being particularly popular. It's not a good game though, failing to capture the sheer atmosphere that the original game oozed from every pixel. Despite this, Chris feels that Tiertex did get some things right, revealing, "I think it captured the main gameplay elements of *Strider*, the agility."

The Mega Drive, Master System and Game Gear versions came out a little later and were known as *Journey From Darkness: Strider Returns* in the US. Considering the power of the host machines they were all far weaker than the home computer counterparts, let down by clunky controls, drab-looking levels and poor stage design. While Strider Hinjo no longer transforms into a robot, his new shuriken-throwing shenanigans add little to the game and it's little wonder that Capcom conveniently ignores all versions of *Strider II*.

It may have ignored the dull platformer it had allowed US Gold to licence, but Capcom certainly wasn't ignoring the fact that *Strider* still appeared to be popular with gamers. In fact, Capcom was planning a sequel of its own…

Capcom had released *Marvel Vs Capcom: Clash Of Super Heroes* in 1998 and tested the waters by including Strider Hiryu as a prominent playable fighter. Gamers were instantly drawn to the acrobatic ninja, giving Capcom the confidence to continue with its own sequel. It wouldn't be easy however, as Yotsui had long since left Capcom. In fact he'd already made his own spiritual successor to *Strider* in the form of Mitchell Corp's delightfully nutty *Osman*.

Step forward Sho Sakai, who found himself as art director on the highly anticipated sequel, which was first released in arcades in 1999 before being ported to Sony's PlayStation in 2000. *Strider* may have seemingly lost its heart with the departure of Yotsui, but just one play of Capcom's sequel was enough to know that the developer knew exactly what it was doing. "There was naturally lots of pressure," begins Sakai about the challenging sequel, "but I was also deeply honoured to be able to work on the design of the sequel to the legendary *Strider*, which more than compensated for the pressure I felt."

And that pressure was palpable because *Strider*'s fan base is small but incredibly loyal. Sakai definitely felt it, finding himself in the same situation as current developer Double Helix





» [PlayStation] At the beginning of each stage you're treated to these cool cut-scenes.

Games. "The [hardest thing was] the need to satisfy the diehard," Sakai continues. "It was tough to strike the right balance: if you keep things too similar to *Strider* then the sequel wouldn't be interesting, but if you change too much then fans would not accept it."

The solution was to effectively remake *Strider*, with the final game featuring two of *Strider*'s original stages and many other elements, including retreads of memorable set pieces and notable bosses such as the bounty hunter Solo and the Kuniang MA Team. The first three levels of Capcom's explosive sequel could be tackled in any order, finishing off with a return to the floating battleship Balrog and another trip to The Third Moon, the base of Grandmaster Meio.

It was all topped off by some amazing new visuals that perfectly captured the spirit of the 1989 original. Although the gaming world was actively embracing 3D technology, Capcom wisely decided to make *Strider* 2.5D, with neat 3D backgrounds giving the game some impressive depth and slick rotation effects. "With the move to 3D backgrounds, we were able to make the levels more than just basic horizontal traversal against a backdrop," explains Sakai about *Strider 2*'s distinctive look. "Some of the enemies were created in 3D as well, so the confluence of 2D and 3D was one of the key aspects of the title."

Another key aspect was ensuring that *Strider 2*'s bosses were just as over-the-top as those found in the arcade original. Capcom's team happily obliged, delivering an impressive menagerie of foes in addition to those returning from *Strider*. Each of *Strider 2*'s stages were divided into smaller sections that typically ended in a boss battle. Memorable encounters include a skirmish with a robotic wooly mammoth, riding along the back of the gigantic Emperor Dragon (an encounter that's replicated in the new *Strider*) and taking out a huge Kraken. "Bosses are an important part of *Strider* for sure, and I think the highly original designs are what makes them so memorable," explains Sakai. "Although many bosses are quickly defeated, they still make a lasting impression, which is quite an amazing accomplishment."

One of the most impressive bosses is Strider Hien, who acts as a suitable nemesis for Hiryu and is unlockable on the PlayStation version. He's the entire creation of Sakai, who revealed the following interesting revelation about him. "In my original design, he wore a long-sleeved top. When I checked the pixel art, though, for some reason he had been drawn without any sleeves at all! Meanwhile, the cut-scene illustrations stayed true to my original design, so his sleeves are intact. Hien is the only character who sports summer and winter wear!"

Hiryu himself arguably remained the star of the show, with Capcom boosting his already powerful moves to make him more like the one-man army that appears in Double Helix Games's sequel and Capcom's *Vs* games. Infinitely faster than his 1989 counterpart, he's now got a variety of useful jumps – including a double jump – for quickly changing direction or propelling himself off walls and a useful boost attack that enables him to launch plasma waves from his Cypher, giving him a fighting chance against Grandmaster Meio's many generals.

Despite being a genuinely thrilling arcade game, *Strider 2* wasn't a success for Capcom, and while it was released across all regions ▶

FAN FICTION

The moment Double Helix knew it had to up its game

We'll admit to be a little concerned after hearing that Double Helix Games would be handling *Strider*'s reboot (although we're happy to be proved wrong). Even *we* didn't go to the following lengths though…

"Right after the game was announced at Comic-Con, we got an email from a *Strider* fan who had dissected the footage of the game found on the web," recalls a bemused Jorge Osequera. "He sent screenshots of every location in the footage that had the Kazakh star flipped. He included shots from the original game and did side by side comparisons to point out where we went wrong. We always knew that the old-school fans would be the most critical, but that email was a huge reality check for us. Just thinking about the process that this fan went through to make sure we got the details right really inspired us to double down on the details." If you're reading this article *Strider* fan, we'd love to hear what you think of the finished game.

RIGHT

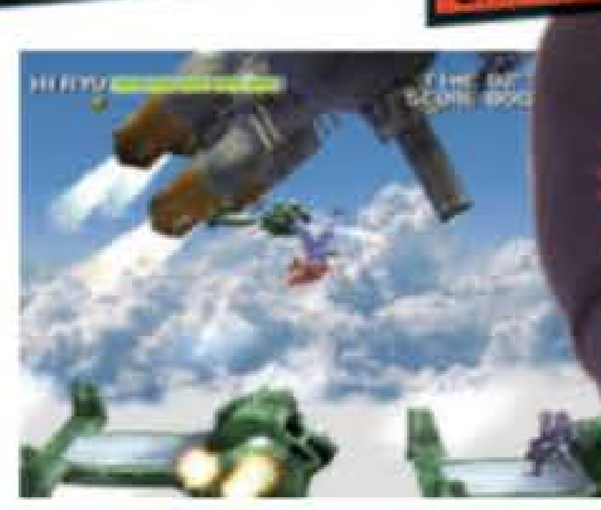


WRONG



"I think the highly original designs are what makes them so memorable"
Sho Sakai









» *Strider 2*'s lead artist Sho Sakai gets into character.

THE ULTIMATE NINJA

It's a deadly face-off as classic videogame ninjas do battle



RAIDEN
MOST LIKELY TO: Whinge about his personal life
LEAST LIKELY TO: Star in a proper *Metal Gear* game



NINJA HAMSTER
MOST LIKELY TO: Beat up anthropomorphic rats
LEAST LIKELY TO: Win this ninja showdown



ZOOL
MOST LIKELY TO: Have an identity crisis
LEAST LIKELY TO: Get sponsored by Iron Bru



JOE MUSASHI
MOST LIKELY TO: Own a pet dog
LEAST LIKELY TO: Properly train it



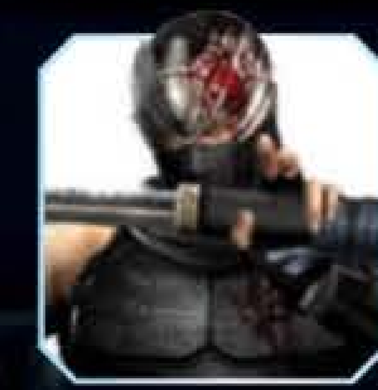
SCORPION
MOST LIKELY TO: Look like a palette swap
LEAST LIKELY TO: Get his own game



STRIDER HIRYU
MOST LIKELY TO: Ride on the back of a brontosaurus
LEAST LIKELY TO: Get another Tiertex sequel



LEONARDO
MOST LIKELY TO: Say something *turtley* irritating
LEAST LIKELY TO: Become a ninja hamster



RYU HAYABUSA
MOST LIKELY TO: Lose his family heirloom
LEAST LIKELY TO: Appear in any more good *Ninja Gaiden* games

ROUND ONE

RAIDEN VS NINJA HAMSTER

■ Ninja hamster or not he's still just a hamster, and Raiden cuts Metal Gears in half before breakfast. Raiden ends the battle by stepping on the hapless hamster before he's even had a chance to squeak.

WINNER: RAIDEN

ZOOL VS JOE MUSASHI

■ Although he's from the Nth Dimension, Zool is actually a pretty rubbish ninja. Joe Musashi easily jumps over the Chupa Chups Zool throws at him, returning fire with deadly lethal shurikens. Silly Zool.

WINNER: JOE MUSASHI

SCORPION VS STRIDER HIRYU

■ "Get over here!" screams Scorpion as he flings his trusty tethered spear in Hiryu's direction. Hiryu effortlessly slides under the incoming weapon and proceeds to slash at Scorpion with his Cypher. Win.

WINNER: STRIDER HIRYU

LEONARDO VS RYU HAYABUSA

■ Ryu immediately leaps into action, grabbing Leonardo and pulling off his deadly Izuna Drop. Unfortunately for Hayabusa, cheeky Leonardo simply retracts his head into his shell, leaving Hayabusa with a broken neck.

WINNER: LEONARDO









ROUND TWO

RAIDEN VS JOE MUSASHI

■ Realising the power of his opponent, sneaky Joe Musashi (from the Mega Drive version of *Shadow Dancer*) sets his pet dog on him. Raiden proceeds to bitch about his personal life, causing Joe and his faithful hound to slink off in disgust

WINNER: RAIDEN

STRIDER HIRYU VS LEONARDO

■ Trained by Splinter, Leo is the strongest of all four turtles. Years of training can't prepare him for Strider Hiryu's awesome skills though. Left shell-shocked, he soon sods off for some much-needed pizza with his brothers.

WINNER: STRIDER HIRYU

FINAL ROUND

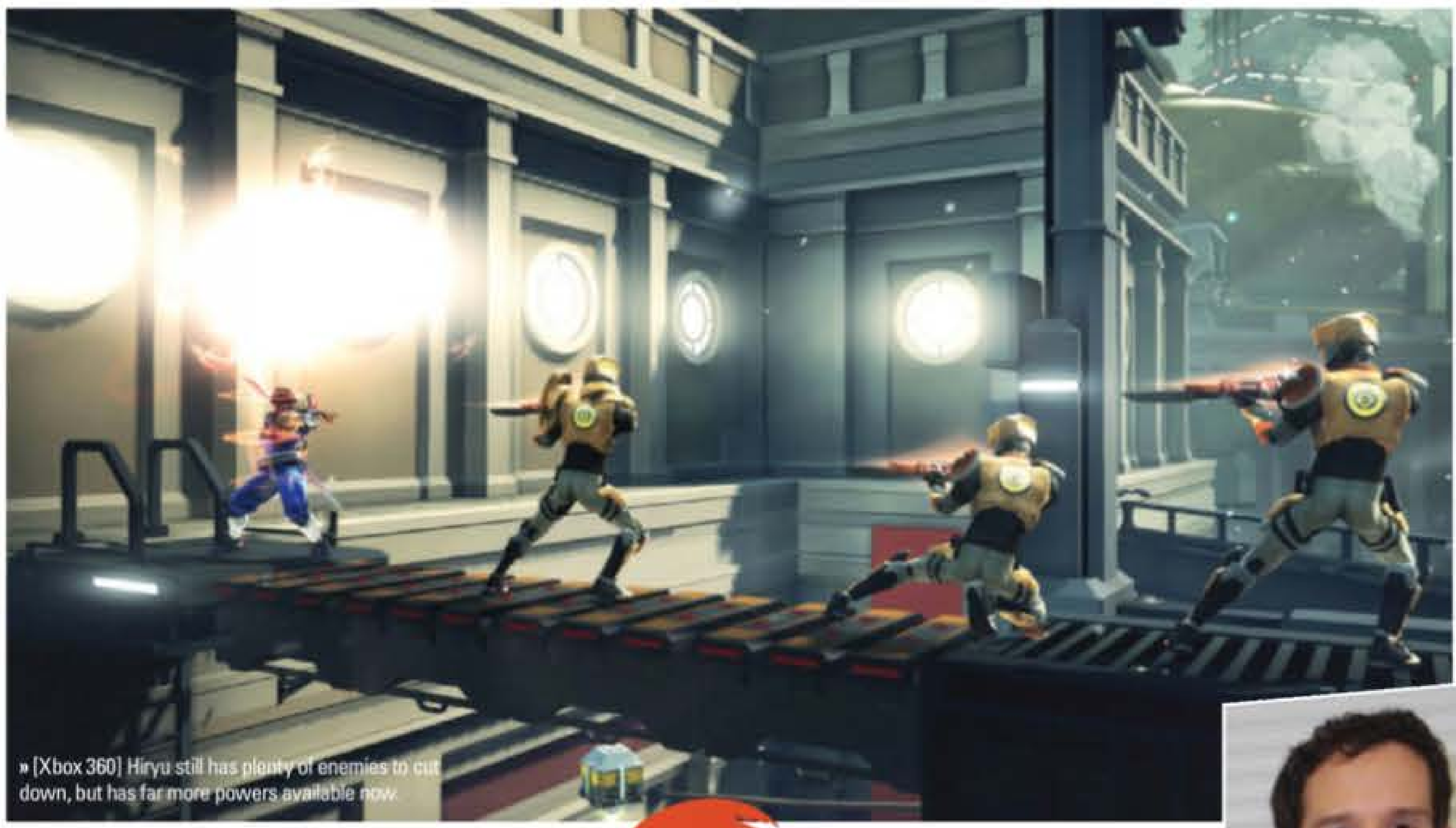


STRIDER HIRYU VS RAIDEN

■ Confident that he won't lose a battle in a box out found in a feature that's entirely dedicated to him, a casual Hiryu wades in. Raiden easily cuts him down in seconds. Did we mention he cuts Metal Gears in half before breakfast?

WINNER: RAIDEN





» [Xbox 360] Hiryu still has plenty of enemies to cut down, but has far more powers available now.



» [Xbox 360] Fans of *Strider* will be pleased to hear that he remains extremely agile in his new adventure.

▶ it remains a surprisingly low-key game, which is a pity considering its actual brilliance. Despite his fan base, Hiryu was once again relegated to the sidelines appearing in numerous cameos and the occasional versus fighting game in the intervening years. A *Strider* remake was revealed to have been in the works at Grin Barcelona in 2009, but was quickly cancelled by Capcom at its prototype stage. Grin itself disappeared shortly afterwards and the hope of a new game died with it.

Just four years later however, Capcom used the San Diego Comic Con to announce the trailer of a brand new *Strider* game – to an ecstatic response. As the days passed gamers began to voice concerns due to the previous output of Double Helix Games, but as new information continued to drip out of Capcom HQ, it became clear that the studio did understand the importance of the franchise it had been handed.

"We love the *Strider* fans, both the older generation and the newer generation, and we take all the feedback from them very seriously," assures *Strider*'s producer Jorge Oseguera. "When the game was first announced, we were all very nervous for the reveal. We were confident in the game we were making, but first and foremost we wanted to hear from the *Strider* fans. It was such a relief once the trailer hit the web and the fans had positive things to say about the reboot. I still get goose bumps watching the reaction from the crowd at SDCC when Strider Hiryu first appeared on-screen."

It takes more than a good trailer to make a good *Strider* game however, and the biggest surprise about Double Helix's new *Strider* was that it plays out more like a Metroidvania, meaning the original NES game seems to be as every bit as inspirational as its arcade counterpart. What we've played so far suggests that is plenty of DNA from the original arcade game, but we were still keen to know the reasoning behind the team's new design choices. "We wanted to keep *Strider*'s fast action and fluid gameplay front and centre, but we also wanted to create a much more expansive and immersive backdrop that would support an adventure that takes multiple hours to unfold," admits Jorge. "While I wouldn't say that we are straight up Metroidvania, we're definitely influenced by Metroidvania games, and wanted to marry elements of that sort of non-linear adventure and exploration with *Strider*'s furious Cypher-slashing action."

Regardless of *Strider*'s new game direction, it's all for nothing if Strider Hiryu himself doesn't feel like the titular ninja. The hours we've spent with *Strider* suggest that Double Helix knows what its doing. The controls feel fluid and precise, Hiryu himself powers through stages, while his repertoire of tricks is extremely impressive. It may not look like a *Strider* game (it's a little too drab-looking for our tastes) but it certainly does feel like one. "The first thing we did was to make sure to nail Hiryu's core movement and Cypher-slashing gameplay," reveals Jorge. "We knew that if we couldn't get that perfect, the rest didn't matter. Beyond that, it was all about fleshing out the world and the story. We're all fans of the original games so we really wanted to capture the essence of the classics. You'll see familiar themes throughout the levels as well as characters from the previous games. Tony Barnes (*Strider*'s design director) has been making games for over 20 years and is a huge *Strider* fan. In the early [21st Century] he created a bucket list of games that he wanted to make. *Strider* was in his top five. On top of that, we had the creative team from Capcom in Osaka, which included one of the artists from the original games. I hope that gives the fans some comfort and lets them know that *Strider*'s in the right hands."

The big question that many will ask of course is whether the studio has nailed the over-the-top bosses that the series is so memorable for. Capcom's James Vance feels fans have nothing to worry about, revealing that the team has relished the challenge that the bosses offer. "Modern technology and an expansive game design have provided the opportunity to update and polish classic boss game mechanics, battle length and pacing," he begins. "Solo, the cyborg





» James Vance (top) and Jorge Oseguera have been crucial to the success of *Strider*'s reboot.

» [Xbox 360] There are plenty of returning bosses, many of which are far tougher to defeat than before.



bounty hunter, for example, has always looked very cool and threatening, but had a limited set of actions and was quickly defeated. In this latest *Strider*, however, he realises his full potential with an arsenal of powerful attacks that will surely test players' skills in an extensive battle. It's been a challenge to update classic bosses, but seeing them do all of these things that you only fantasised about as a child has been very rewarding, not to mention very cool."

James also feels confident that gamers will enjoy the many new abilities that Hiryu now has at his disposal, revealing that the team looked both to the past and present to ensure that their hero still felt like the Strider Hiryu gamers know and love. "When developing the character for this latest *Strider* game, both the recent *Marvel Vs Capcom* and arcade iterations were analysed, and those characteristics which best served the gameplay and visual presentation of the character [were] implemented," he continues. "From a visual perspective, the character has been updated to match the artistic design and HD fidelity of current systems, but maintains the silhouette, colour scheme and key poses and animations of the *Marvel Vs Capcom* series, resulting in a fresh yet recognisable design. The core gameplay rests upon a refined iteration of Strider's bedrock of running, sliding, jumping and climbing, and is infused with actions from the *Marvel Vs Capcom* series as well as an array of new abilities."

Strider should be available by the time you read this article, so you'll be able to tell for yourselves if Capcom and Double Helix Games succeeded in rebooting one of gaming's most iconic ninjas. He might not have the legacy of some videogame icons, but there's no denying that the character has touched a lot of gamers in the last 25 years. "From the way he moves to the way he talks, he's the embodiment of cool," concludes James when we ask about Strider's enduring popularity with his fan base. "But it's a coolness born from the original design of the character that isn't necessarily good or evil, and certainly isn't topical or trendy. He's the timeless badass that everyone wishes they could be – that is why it feels so empowering to pick up the controller and become Strider Hiryu." We couldn't agree more.



Special thanks to Laura Skelly and Maiko Hinson for making this article possible

THE UNCONVERTED

Arcade games that never made it home

SCROLLING FIGHTER EDITION

BIG FIGHT: BIG TROUBLE IN THE ATLANTIC OCEAN

■ **Developer:** Tatsumi ■ **Year:** 1992 ■ **Genre:** Scrolling fighter

■ **Though Tatsumi might be best remembered for *Buggy Boy*, this scrolling fighter is no slouch.** *Big Fight: Big Trouble In The Atlantic Ocean* is the last game released by Tatsumi before it transitioned to manufacturing arcade cabinets. Attempting to capitalise on the popularity of games such as Street Fighter II, it included a mode for two players. The cast of characters is a little larger than other games in the genre, with the playable characters including an English martial artist and an Egyptian magician.

Competing with the beat-'em-ups that were dominating the arcades must have seemed like a good idea, but it doesn't work so well in practice. *Big Fight*'s versus mode is similar to those found in the *Streets Of Rage* games, and though each character is unique, there isn't enough depth to the action to be truly competitive with the one-on-one fighters.

Thankfully, the main game is much more entertaining, though it's a fairly standard scrolling fighter. While only three of the game's characters are available at the beginning, the rest are bosses that join the cast when defeated. This is accompanied by the wonderful mistranslation "Now I came to my sense. Can you take me into partnership?"

The cruise ship setting provides for fights in areas such as bars and restaurants, as well as stages such as traditional Japanese rooms, gardens and gyms. Apparently, the restrictive theme can be subverted by virtue of having an awesome boat. The locations look good too, with lively backgrounds featuring nice details such as animated bystanders and fish tanks.

Weaponry is also over the top, from swords and footballs to a grenade launcher that is as tall as some of the characters. Unfortunately, Tatsumi wasn't able to animate these in a convincing manner, as they often float around the hands of the character using them and jerk around during walking animations.

Even without Tatsumi's exit from the market, *Big Fight* may have struggled to find a home release. Fighting fans were being drawn to the very same beat-'em-ups that inspired the inclusion of *Big Fight*'s one-on-one mode, and being rough around the edges wouldn't have helped in facing off against genre heavyweights like as *Streets Of Rage 2*.



CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

DOUBLE DRAGON 1987

While *Double Dragon* was converted to a variety of systems, it's the NES version that is most similar to *Big Fight*. It offered a one-on-one mode inspired by the main game's Billy versus Jimmy climax, allowing players to take control of enemies as well as the brothers.





» The one-on-one mode looks the part, but like similar modes in the *Streets Of Rage* games, fails to keep your attention due to a lack of depth.

» We're not sure what kind of cruise ship features a garden, but we're guessing that it's a pretty nice one. Backgrounds remain diverse and colourful throughout.

» *Big Fight*'s characters exhibit some questionable stereotyping – native American Garuda's a key example, performing a war cry as part of his walking animation.

» Make sure to keep a close eye on your health when you're using special attacks, as they cause damage to your character as well as the enemies.

BEST LEFT IN THE ARCADE

TECMO KNIGHT

■ **Developer:** Tecmo ■ **Year:** 1989 ■ **Genre:** Scrolling fighter



■ On the face of it, *Tecmo Knight* should be a lot of fun. This medieval-themed game gives you control of a small-looking knight, riding either a giant warrior or a tiger which can be switched between at will. The late Eighties action origins shine through, with defeated enemies experiencing gory decapitations rather than simply blinking out of existence.

Unfortunately the game is really too clunky for its own good, as simple standards in the genre are cast aside. As an example, *Tecmo Knight* can only jump forwards, which causes problems in avoiding enemy attacks. Additionally, jumping toward an enemy causes you to land on them. This leads to the occasional cool enemy-hopping moment, but more often it causes irritation, particularly when you want to land and attack an adjacent enemy but instead get knocked off another enemy's shoulders.

Enemies aren't significantly stunned by attacks either, leading to situations in which you think you're successfully beating down a group, only to be knocked out of a combo. While patient gamers will get something from its interesting ideas, *Tecmo Knight*'s disregard for genre conventions makes for a frustrating experience.

KNUCKLE BASH

■ **Developer:** Toaplan ■ **Year:** 1993 ■ **Genre:** Scrolling fighter

■ ***Knuckle Bash* is a scrolling fighter themed around the world of professional wrestling.** The three protagonists – a pretty boy, an Elvis lookalike and a luchador – take to the streets to free the wrestling world of the Mad Bull Group, encountering a variety of enemies along the way. These include a green man who looks a bit too close to *Street Fighter*'s Blanka and even malevolent hotel doormen. You're able to recruit bosses as playable characters once they've been beaten, doubling the cast.



» [Arcade] It looks like the enemy here is a jelly man, but in fact he is just taking a special move.

Being very manly men, our heroes reject the use of weaponry, instead relying on their wrestling holds. These are pretty unconventional though, with the highlight being a rather brilliant attack in which the Elvis impersonator grabs the enemy, transforms them into an energy guitar and plays them for huge damage.

Unfortunately, the two-button control method relies upon hitting both buttons together, and in heated moments it's easy to perform the wrong attack. The game is visually plain, too – while the sprites are bold, the animation and backdrops don't match up to releases from Capcom or Konami. Ultimately though, the game's merits didn't cause its lack of a home port, as the demise of Toaplan in 1994 scuppered any chances it had.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

BRAVOMAN 1988



While *Bravoman* parodies Japanese film rather than wrestling and includes platforming elements, the game shares a common thread with *Knuckle Bash* in that it doesn't take itself too seriously. Humour is a prominent feature of both games, but Namco's release made the journey home on PC Engine.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

ALTERED BEAST 1988



It's hard to find anything like *China Gate*, but Sega's *Altered Beast* also takes place on a single plane and allows the player to transform into a different beast in each stage. The Mega Drive version was the system's early pack-in game, highlighting the power of the 16-bit technology.

CHINA GATE

■ **Developer:** Technos ■ **Year:** 1988 ■ **Genre:** Scrolling fighter


■ **Very Loosely based on the Chinese novel *Journey To The West*, *China Gate* stars a trio of animals fighting all manner of supernatural creatures.** Instead of allowing for movement into and out of the screen as in most scrolling fighters, the action in *China Gate* takes place in platform-filled arenas, which are often as large vertically as horizontally.

You'll be assaulted from all sides as enemies emerge from doors dotted around each stage, making for a game with frantic pacing and relentless action. Thankfully, escaping to higher ground when the danger becomes too much is a viable tactic. After enough enemies have been defeated, a boss will appear to ruin your chosen animal's day. Fortunately, regular enemies drop useful power-ups including projectiles and a screen-filling lightning attack, which can be saved for defeating tougher enemies.



» [Arcade] Bosses can take huge chunks of your health very quickly, so it's best to save your power-ups.

Unfortunately, each of the different characters plays exactly the same, with the only difference being their power-ups. Combined with its unusual subject matter, it's easy to see why Technos stuck to *Double Dragon* for the home market.



Swan Song

A WonderSwan Retrospective

Proof that not even Gundam can topple Nintendo, Bandai's WonderSwan still had an incredible selection of games worthy of a place in anyone's collection. Kerry Brunskill takes us through the system's life



» The Wonder Swan's buttons also double up as the handheld's D-pad. They work surprisingly well.



» There's no backlit screen on the WonderSwan range, so the contrast dial is greatly needed.

Created by the legendary Game Boy designer Gunpei Yokoi and backed by Bandai's deep pockets as well as its enormous marketing muscle, the WonderSwan had gamers playing SNES ports and connecting to the internet while those of us outside Japan were still marvelling over competent NES ports such as *Super Mario Bros DX* on the Game Boy Color. A success in every way bar the one that mattered to shareholders, the system nevertheless maintained a high gaming standard from launch day right up to the final release and has left gamers with a small but exciting box of treasures to explore to this day.

It's an odd name, but as with all the decisions behind Bandai's sleek handheld there's a reason for that strange moniker. The idea is that a swan is an elegant bird on the surface but under the water there's a set of strong legs powering it along. The WonderSwan line was created with this design philosophy in mind – beautiful outward design coupled with powerful components inside.

At first glance the shell design is vaguely reminiscent of Atari's Lynx – a relatively wide handheld designed with the ability to be played vertically and a spare set of buttons at the top of one side. Those extra buttons might look redundant, but unlike Atari's ill-fated system the extra set of four on the WonderSwan are completely separate rather than repeats, meaning developers could make good use of them whichever way up the handheld was being held, the Y set often being used for menus, shortcuts and other handy but not immediately essential tasks.

Internally the machine was more than up to the task of realising Gunpei Yokoi's hardware vision too – boasting a custom 16-bit ASWAN processor and a 2.49 inch, 224x144 resolution screen, which was far in advance of the Game Boy's aging 8-bit CPU and 160x144 display. So it would seem strange then that the original WonderSwan launched with a monochrome screen on 4 March 1999, five months after the Japanese release of the Game Boy Color.



» [WonderSwan] Although *Langrisser Millennium* is not considered part of the main canon, this spin-off strategy RPG is still a lot of fun.

The reasoning was simple; Gunpei Yokoi had already seen his earlier Game Boy design crush the Game Gear and Atari Lynx – solid proof that consumers were more concerned about battery life and strong games than owning devices with colour screens, and with the WonderSwan needing only a single AA battery to achieve roughly 30 hours' play time as well as costing ¥2000 (about £10) less than the Game Boy Color, both Bandai and Yokoi must have thought they were onto a sure-fire success with the WonderSwan.

History has of course proven otherwise, but then again most systems would look bad when measured against one of the best-selling handhelds of all time. The WonderSwan had a fantastic and well-balanced selection of games at launch – headline puzzler *Gunpey* was seen as

THE SALES

How WonderSwan compared in sales to other relevant handhelds

The WonderSwan is broadly dismissed as a failure; just a strange Japan-only handheld with some *Gundam* games on it – but it actually did much better than most gamers think. Accurate figures are of course always difficult to come by, but sources generally agree that approximately 3.5 million WonderSwans were sold, with the WonderSwan Color making up at least 1.1 million of that total. This pales in comparison to the original Game Boy (86.66 million worldwide), the Game Boy Color (31.03 million worldwide) and it doesn't even match up to Sega's Game Gear (11 million worldwide) but it does beat reported figures for the Neo Geo Pocket series (1.35 million worldwide) as well as better-known home hardware such as the 3DO (2 million worldwide) and the TurboGrafx (2.5 million in the US).

The fact is that, much like the Dreamcast, the WonderSwan wasn't so much of a failure – it just wasn't the success that Bandai needed it to be.



» It's amazing to think that this impressive little handheld is actually powered by a single AA battery. The WonderSwan Color lasts for 20 hours!





» A strange game deserves a strange box, and *Flash Koibito-Kun*'s love-dealing ninja is no exception.

» [WonderSwan Color] *Rhyme Rider Kerorican* – as quirky and unique as you'd expect from the creators of *PaRappa The Rapper!*

▶ the system's answer to *Tetris*, Squaresoft's popular dungeon adventure *Chocobo's Mysterious Dungeon*, arcade train simulator *Densha De GO!* and lastly Tomy's *Shin Nihon Pro Wrestling* meant most Japanese gamers would be able to find something they liked, and these were swiftly followed up by even more games by some of the biggest developers and most popular series in Japan at the time, and by only the end of April the WonderSwan library already had 18 titles including *Beatmania*, *Puyo Puyo Tsuu*, *Super Robot Taisen* and even an entry from Koei's long-running *Romance Of The Three Kingdoms* strategy series.

Bandai itself was more than keen to throw its full licensing muscle behind the system, giving WonderSwan developers access to some of the biggest and most recognisable anime series of all time. *Digimon*, *Gundam*, *One Piece*, *Dragon Ball*… during the handheld's life it had it all, and Bandai was sensible enough to ensure that these games were good quality titles in their own right even if they aren't all considered classics of their era.



RPG fans did very well out of the WonderSwan's library too, with excellent exclusives like action-RPG *Star Hearts*, multi-game love-in and *Project X Zone* precursor *Namco Super Wars* and soon-to-be-GBA-classic *Riviera* rubbing shoulders with better known games such as old-school dungeon crawler *Wizardry: Proving Grounds Of The Mad Overlord* and Squaresoft's esoteric *Makai Toushi SaGa* remake.

Witnessing the success of the Game Boy Color and with SNK's Neo Geo Pocket also offering a colour alternative and competitor to the WonderSwan, Bandai did the only sensible thing it could and released an updated version of its WonderSwan with a colour screen on 9 December 2000, just 21 months after the original launched. This didn't just see Bandai play catch-up with its competitors' handhelds but completely outstrip them, while still getting an all-important 20 hours' play from a single AA battery. The new colour screen boasted the ability to display 241 colours simultaneously, with an astonishing 16 colours per sprite.

For comparison, the Game Boy Color could only manage four colours per sprite – and one of those was 'off'. The Neo Geo Pocket Color suffered similar sprite limitations as Nintendo's hardware and was only capable of displaying a relatively meagre 146 colours simultaneously. This boost in technology allowed the WonderSwan Color to produce almost SNES-quality graphics, far in advance of anything



» [WonderSwan Color] A true classic and the best handheld port until the PSP compilation release.

else available on a portable at the time, while still remaining backwards compatible with all previous monochrome WonderSwan games.

Bandai ensured that the WonderSwan Color had an incredible launch, just like its now obsolete black and white previous design. Popular puzzler *Gunpey* came back with a colourised remake, NanaOn-Sha brought rhythm-action to the handheld with the notoriously unforgiving *Rhyme Rider Kerorican* and with *Digimon Adventure 02* Bandai made sure that the new WonderSwan still had some heavy-hitting IP support behind it.

But the real jewel in the crown was *Final Fantasy*, looking better than it ever had and at the time a WonderSwan exclusive. Squaresoft was one of the most notable supporters of the WonderSwan throughout the system's life; its unwillingness to work on Nintendo hardware proving to be a real asset to Bandai with its system being the first place to get high-quality remakes of some of its greatest games, as well as experimental titles like *Wild Card* and that still remain exclusive to this day.

Sadly the success of this relaunch was short lived: the WonderSwan Color only had a few



» The WonderSwan has a number of games that can be playered vertically. This is *Gunpey*.

WONDERSTUFF

The handheld that had a surprising amount of cool additional extras

For a handheld released in just one country the WonderSwan has an exceptional array of special edition hardware, unique add-ons and limited edition games. Bandai, never one to miss a marketing trick, was happy to release the handheld in every colour under the sun and also produce special editions based on various *Gundam* games, *Final Fantasy* and *Chocobo's Mysterious Dungeon* as well as numerous *Digimon* bundles. Games often came with stickers, collectable cards or in *With You*'s case a small figure, something still rarely seen today.

Accessories were plentiful too – the WonderBorg was an insect-like robot controlled from the WonderSwan via an IR-equipped cart, the WonderGate allowed certain games to access the internet via the user's mobile phone, and the WonderWitch (see a pattern here?) for the most hardcore of fans – a full dev kit that allowed users to create their own games for the system and dump them onto the included 128Mb flash cart.





short months at the top of the technology tree before Nintendo released the Game Boy Advance in March 2001 – but Bandai wasn't going to let its machine go down without a fight…

During this tough time the WonderSwan Color still managed to produce a lot of strong releases – *Romancing SaGa*, *Mr Driller*, *Xi [Sai] Little* (better known in the West as *Devil Dice*), *Guilty Gear Petit* to name just a few – but ultimately it wasn't enough to woo gamers away from Nintendo's GBA juggernaut and so on 12 July 2002 Bandai gave the system one more push and launched what would turn out to be the final hardware revision – the SwanCrystal.

The 'crystal' in the final version's name referred to the new screen, which was not only far sharper and clearer than the WonderSwan Color's but also a significant improvement on any other competitor's non-backlit screen too. Unfortunately this wasn't enough to prevent further sales decline, but to its credit Bandai and other developers like Capcom and Squaresoft stuck with the system, giving fans a great selection of ports – from standout SNES mech SRPG *Front Mission* to Sega's arcade classic *Golden Axe*, as well as more exclusive games covering a range of tastes and genres from PlayStation SRPG spinoff *Arc The Lad: Kijin Fukkatsu* to anime action brawler *One Piece Grand Battle: Swan Colosseum* – at a time when other companies would have simply cut their losses and run.

By 2004 the WonderSwan was effectively finished, but the handheld refused to lie down and die. The WonderWitch, an expensive home-user WonderSwan development environment released four years earlier, had the honour of creating the last two WonderSwan games – *Judgement Silversword* and *Dicing Knight Period*. Both of these were winners of the WonderWitch programming contest and the prize, as you may have guessed, was to be commercially released for the platform. Both games fetch eye-watering amounts today, their quality making them must-haves for gamers and their scarcity making them prized games for discerning collectors.

Far more than just an importer's curiosity, the WonderSwan's five-year battle against one of gaming's Goliath's has gifted gamers with a rich library of 198 games across a broad variety of genres, many of which are still exclusive even today. A prime example of the difference between poor sales and poor quality, Bandai's sleek swan deserves a second flight. ✱







» *Wild Card* artist Akihiko Yoshida shows of his beautiful artwork both in and out of the game.



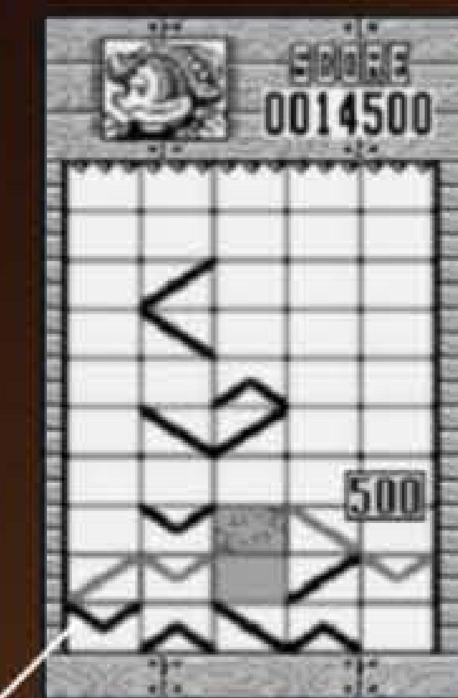
» [WonderSwan Color] Huge, expressive sprites and fast action make *One Piece Grand Battle* ace.

FIVE ESSENTIAL GAMES

Got a WonderSwan? Then you'll need these

FINAL FANTASY

■ One of the most important RPGs of all time also ended up being the best-selling WonderSwan game ever. This remake – the first significant overhaul *Final Fantasy* ever had – was a major coup for the system and formed the basis of all future ports of the game. To add further fuel to Squaresoft's anti-Nintendo fire Bandai also released a limited edition pearl white WonderSwan bundle at the same time.



GUNPEY

■ Created by the legendary Gunpei Yokoi and intended to be the WonderSwan's answer to *Tetris*, this puzzler does a great job of showing off the unique abilities of the system thanks to its vertical play area and clear speech. The game never had the impact Bandai hoped for, but its strong underlying gameplay was enough to produce a few WonderSwan releases as well as more modern remakes for the PSP and DS.

JUDGEMENT SILVERSWORD

■ Clearly inspired by Treasure's classic *Radiant Silvergun*, this shoot-'em-up takes advantage of the WonderSwan's extra screen length by having the player hold the handheld vertically for that authentic arcade experience. Two complimentary weapons give clever players lots of tactics to use and the rapid-fire stage progression keeps the action constant.



CLOCK TOWER

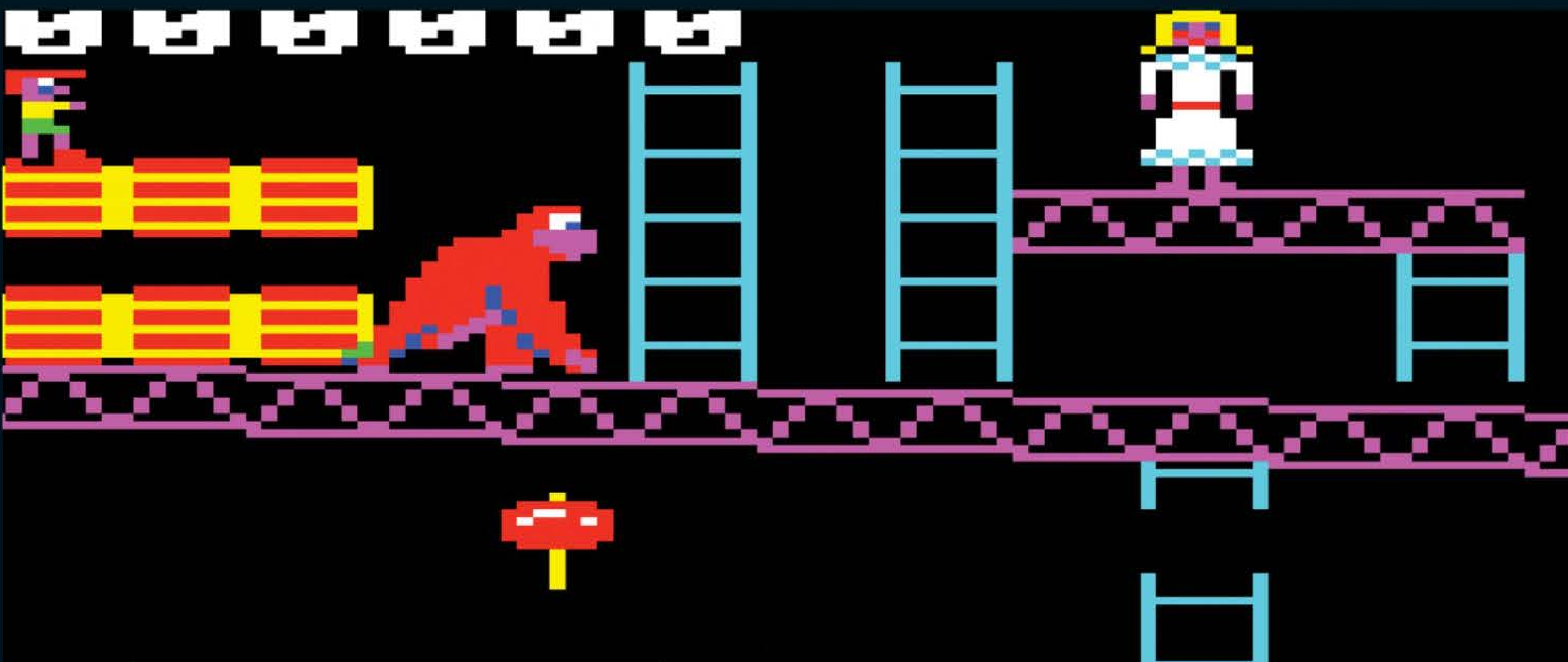
■ It's easy to ask what the fuss is all about when we live in an era where nigh-perfect SNES emulation is just a smartphone app away, but *Clock Tower* is more than just a straight port. Containing extras from the PlayStation release and retaining the random rooms and multiple endings of its big-brother counterparts, *Clock Tower* is just as terrifying in the palm of your hands as it is on your TV.

GUILTY GEAR PETIT 2

■ The Neo Geo Pocket Color is often considered the king of portable fighting, but Sammy proved that the WonderSwan could take on even the mighty SNK at its own game. Fast, fluid, and with a wealth of single-player content to boot, *Guilty Gear Petit 2* captures the charm and pace of the original games while being different enough to work within the limitations of the hardware.

Special thanks to Kim Wild for the use of her WonderSwan Color





Killer Gorilla

ALL KILLER, NO FILLER

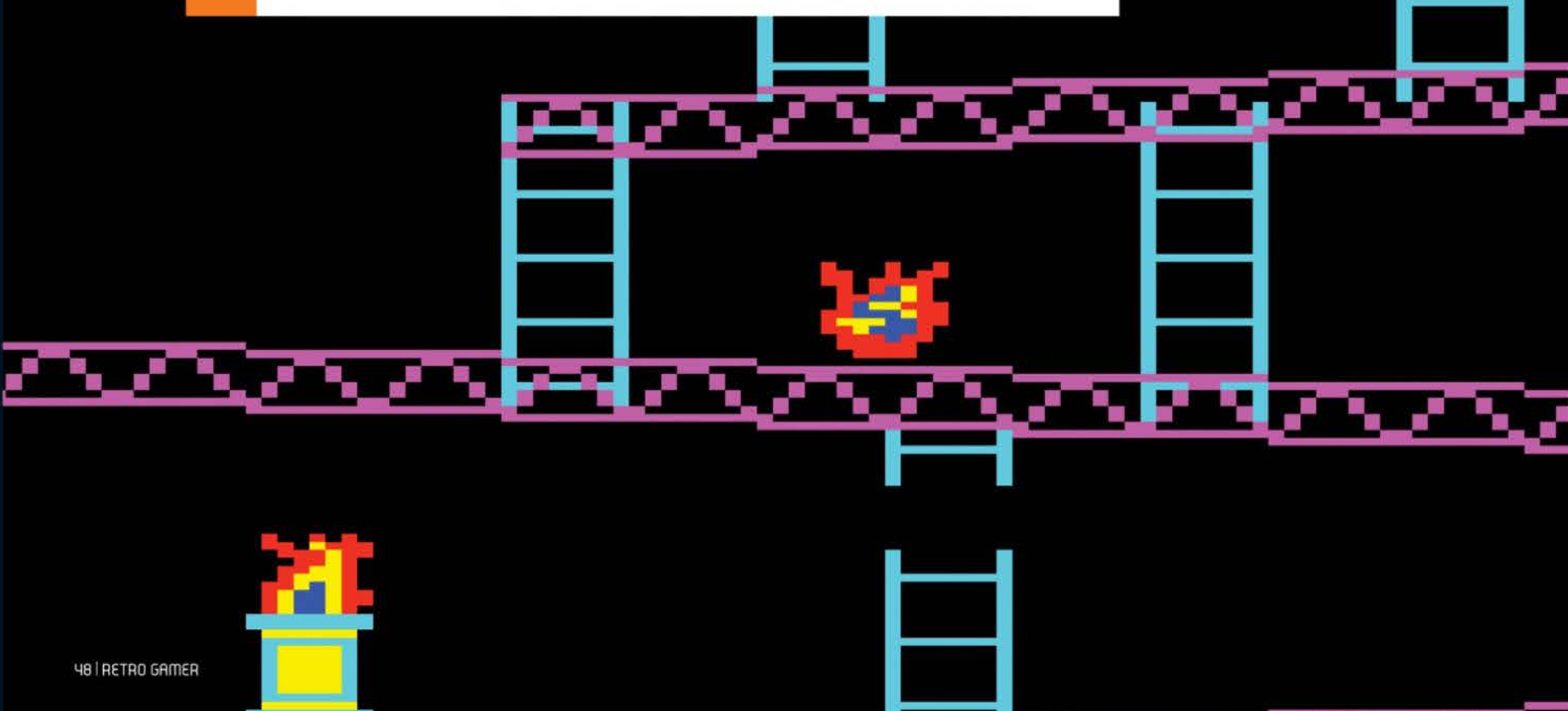


» **BBC Micro**
» **Micro Power**
» **1983**

While it's seen by many as an educational computer, the BBC Micro had plenty of highly entertaining games available for it. It's also a hotbed for a large number of highly impressive clones of popular arcade games, many of which never received official ports on the 8-bit home computer. *Frogger, Defender, Space Invaders, Pac-Man* and *Mr Do!* are just a selection of the classic arcade games that have been cloned by intrepid coders, but this mighty fine effort from Adrian Stephens is easily one of our favourites and remains a great game to play.

Despite the power of the BBC Micro, Adrian was still able to create a very accurate rendition of *Donkey Kong*. It's not quite up to the standards of Ocean's fantastic Amstrad outing, but it remains a highly impressive piece of work and just what we'd expect from the coder who did such a phenomenal job with his unofficial port of Universal's *Mr Do!*.

The colours are garish, but this features all the levels of the original arcade game, something even Nintendo's NES couldn't manage. It also features tight responsive controls, a fun rendition of the original music and engaging gameplay. It's a little easy due to the lack of barrels compared to the arcade game, but the difficulty does pick up significantly as the game loops. *Killer Gorilla* is fast-paced, great fun and eventually offers a stiff challenge. Basically everything you'd expect from a classic arcade conversion – even if it is an unofficial one. *




L=01
BONUS
4200


KILLER GORILLA
By Adrian Stephens


003700
L=01
BONUS
3800


010200
L=01
BONUS
4600


008200
L=01
BONUS
2600

Minority Report

special SHARP X68000 special

Although better known for its near arcade-perfect conversions, Sharp's X68000 also played host to a number of must-play original games. Rory Milne looks beyond the system's coin-op ports to find some standout titles and well-kept secrets



GENOCIDE

■ DEVELOPER: ZOOM INC ■ YEAR: 1989



■ [X68000] *Genocide* delivers frenetic hack-and-slash action, while throwing you fresh challenges.

■ **The 20 or so models in Sharp's X68000 home computer line were sold exclusively in Japan, but even in their home market the systems were very much a niche product.** The original X68000 was launched in 1987 and sported cutting-edge hardware that put it ahead of equivalent systems and on a par with many arcade machines of the time. More advanced models followed, but standing in the way of the series dominating the Japanese sector were the systems' equally impressive price-tags. Sharp's X68000s did have a loyal following, though, despite their high cost. And this support combined with the machines' unique hardware allowed for innovative and groundbreaking games to be created for the line. In this respect, parallels can be drawn between Sharp's powerhouse computers and the Apple II or the ZX Spectrum. The X68000 systems even attracted a developer that matched the quality and style of the Ultimate label – the effortlessly cool Zoom Inc.

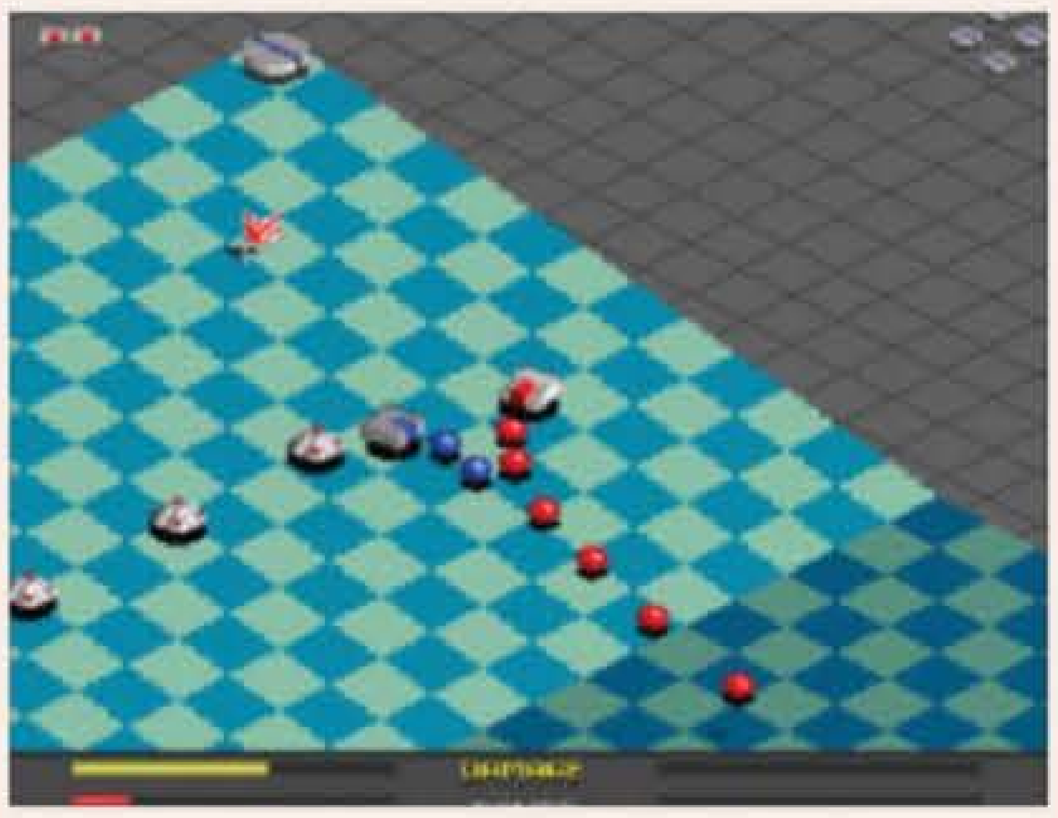
Genocide – Zoom's debut title – was initially an X68000 exclusive, and although it was later ported to NEC's PC Engine CD and adapted for Fujitsu's FM Towns, the Sharp original more than held its own aesthetically while remaining the most challenging version. *Genocide* belongs thematically to the cyberpunk movement and stylistically to the futuristic dystopian manga and anime that found favour in the West during the Nineties – partly thanks to Katsuhiro Otomo's *Akira*. The genocide implied by the game's title refers to the plans of a self-aware super computer tasked with controlling every aspect of life on Earth, which malfunctions and decides to eradicate the human race. The response of



» VALUSA NO FUKUSHUU

■ DEVELOPER: ZAINSOFT CORP ■ YEAR: 1990

■ **It's likely that** *Valusa No Fukushuu*'s troubled development was connected to Zainsoft's demise. What's certain is that the game was trailed in magazine adverts for months before its release, that those adverts showed off many features that didn't make the final product and that Zainsoft closed down shortly after the title hit the shelves. That's not to say that the game isn't worth playing, but it does have some rough edges and a vertical difficulty curve. But those unafraid of a serious challenge are rewarded with some beautifully animated pixel art, epic bosses and a side-scrolling platformer with an emphasis on swordplay and shuriken throwing.



» SQUARE RESORT

■ DEVELOPER: YAMACO/FAMILY SOFT ■ YEAR: 1992

■ **It's difficult to** describe *Square Resort*; visually it looks quite like *Marble Madness*, but the two titles play very differently – in *Square Resort* you control a tank that shoots marbles. Playing against a friend or the X68000, you take a red tank into battle against a blue one on sloped and uneven play-fields where the limitless marbles each side shoots obey gravity once fired. Adding to the chaos are pods that produce a multitude of marbles when shot and flags that repair damage done to the tank that collects them. These may sound like quite simple mechanics, but like Atari's previously mentioned marble-based classic, *Square Resort* provides superlative gameplay.



» KNIGHT ARMS – THE HYBLID FRAMER

■ DEVELOPER: ARSYS SOFTWARE INC ■ YEAR: 1989

■ **The word 'Hyblid'** in *Knight Arms*'s subtitle should read 'Hybrid'; the title's first stage is an into-the-screen shooter akin to *Space Harrier* that seamlessly segues into a second side-scrolling level with enemies that move into and out of the display. The later stages jump between these perspectives, but as the transitions are so smooth it never feels disjointed. *Knight Arms*'s bosses are equally impressive and fill the screen with bullets. Graphically, the game really pushes the X68000, which occasionally causes slow-down. Ignore this, as *Knight Arms* is as exciting as it is varied.



[X68000] Samurai are referenced in the chrome warehouse of a futuristic Far East.



[X68000] Leaping into combat with battle armour and a high-tech samurai sword.

Earth's scientists is to construct experimental battle armour and a high-tech samurai sword for its pilot to combat the mechanical and mutated organic forces that now control the planet. This plot allows *Genocide* to reference the samurai of ancient Japan while showcasing the ultra-modern locations of a futuristic Far East.

In terms of gameplay, *Genocide* delivers frenetic and unrelenting hack-and-slash action, while continually throwing the player fresh challenges. The game's lieutenants each have unique attack patterns and its imaginative bosses each have their own fighting style – so it's vitally important that you become intimately familiar with the various ground and air moves available to the mecha pilot you control in order to make progress.

Visually, *Genocide* is stunning; its beautifully realised pixel-art uses a palette of subtle matt colours and the animation of its sprites is fast and fluid. In fact, at times, *Genocide* feels like a playable anime, and this is reinforced by its detailed cut-scenes. The game's midi soundtrack is suitably upbeat when the action reaches a crescendo but moody or reflective in rare moments of calm between onslaughts.

Those lightning-fast onslaughts are what make the game, though, and more time to collect your thoughts would have slackened the tension that the title intentionally ratchets up as you fight through its devastated wastelands and chrome warehouses.

But *Genocide* is more than just an adrenaline rush. As a package – like the best Ultimate titles – *Genocide* is highly polished, and while its gameplay gives it substance it's the game's accomplished sprites, sumptuous backdrops, considered score and beautiful cover art that give it its style.

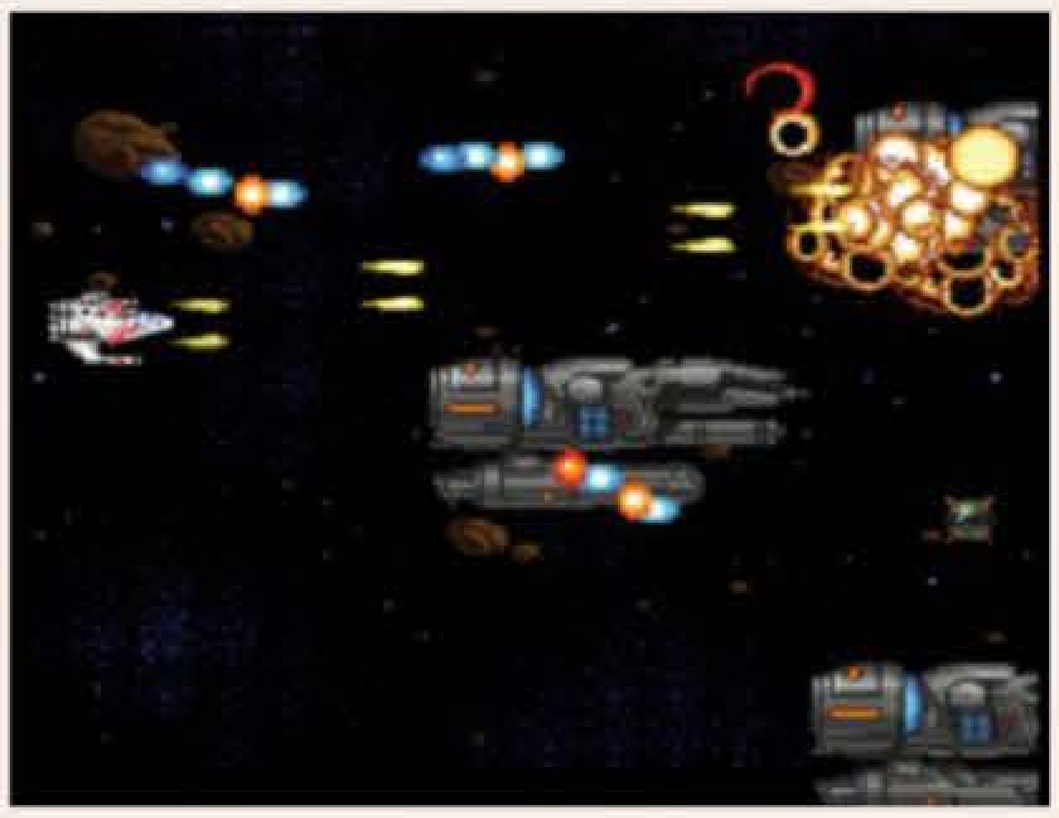
» ABOUT SHARP'S X68000

- Sharp's X68000 computer series was expensive and exclusive to Japan, which limited the number of units sold.
- The arcade-quality graphics produced by the X68000's hardware made the system perfect for coin-op conversions.
- A number of Japanese firms developed original games for Sharp's powerful computer line.





[X68000] Deep underground, fighting the mutated organic forces bred to eradicate the human race.



» STAR TRADER

DEVELOPER: TAKERU ■ YEAR: 1992

■ ***Star Trader* illustrates** how a disappointing game with potential can be salvaged with a bit of tweaking. Case in point: *Star Trader*, an adventure/shooter developed for NEC's PC-8801 that was redesigned for the X68000 as a shooter with a few of the original's cut-scenes. The X68000 is more capable of hosting a side-scrolling blaster than NEC's system, but *Star Trader* is also much better for dropping its trading mechanic. You buy power-ups in the PC-8801 version, which just isn't fun, whereas you collect them in the X68000 adaptation. This trade-off costs *Star Trader* its innovation, but in doing so improves the game.



» MAD STALKER: FULL METAL FORTH

DEVELOPER: FILL-IN CAFE ■ YEAR: 1994

■ **The X68000 version** of *Mad Stalker* is arguably the best. The PC Engine CD and FM Towns ports are both decent, but they lack the parallax scrolling backgrounds and detailed sprites of the X68000 original. *Mad Stalker* has you pilot a giant heavily armed robot – or 'mecha' – through the streets of Japan with the aim of defeating enemy mecha in combat. The detail in the game is incredible; as the mecha fight against a Japanese skyline, comparatively tiny cars and people below flee from the battle. The gameplay is just as accomplished, with acrobatic soldiers and challenging bosses.



» REINFORCER

DEVELOPER: ZAINSOFT ■ YEAR: 1990

■ **Most easily comparable** with *Alien Breed*, *Reinforcer* is a top-down sci-fi shooter. In *Reinforcer* you don't have aliens to contend with; instead you take on a futuristic army. So it's as much a suicide mission as Team17's Amiga triumph, but in keeping with *Alien Breed*, more advanced weapons can be found to deal with hardier foes. The action in *Reinforcer* runs at break-neck speed, which makes charging the wrong way a concern, but a map shows your position and targets. Splitting your attention between this, the other control panel and the on-screen action proves to be a genuinely absorbing experience.

X68000 photograph courtesy of Charlie Maib

Minority Report

ETOILE PRINCESSE

■ DEVELOPER: EXACT ■ YEAR: 1993



■ [X68000] Demons plague the kingdom of the *Etoile Princesse*. This boss is a disembodied skull.

■ ***Etoile Princesse* – or *Star Princess* when translated from French – is the title of the first character you take charge of in Exact's scrolling action-adventure of the same name.** In an example of one of the game's more interesting mechanics, however, when you defeat a boss you're given the choice of taking on the role of the princess you've freed from that boss.

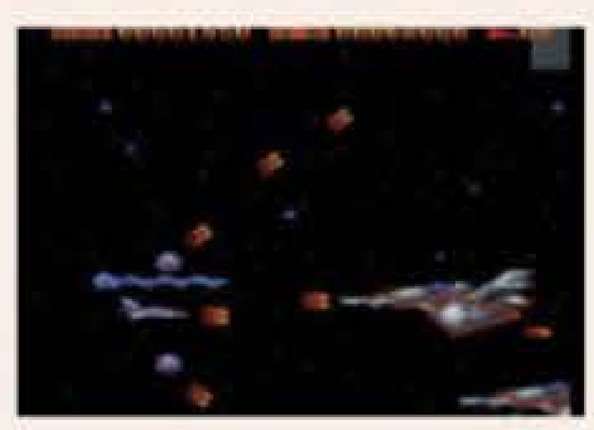
Demons plague the kingdom of the pint-sized royals you play as, the names of which relate to their main attacks – so the Star Princess fires stars from a wand and the Wind Princess uses magic to blow away everything in her path. Not that the game focusses purely on mindless demon-vanquishing, though; *Etoile Princesse* requires puzzle-solving to get through its levels and also demands quite a bit of strategic planning. You have a health bar and a magic bar to keep topped-up, so locating power-ups found in chests scattered throughout the title's colourful environments is essential.

Each princess also has a second more powerful weapon – a bomb – but these burn through magic points and so need to be used sparingly. Additionally, *Etoile Princesse*'s top-down stages allow you to gain a height advantage on your foes by taking to the roofs of cottages or other high areas. But where the game really shines is in tasking the player with picking the princess with the appropriate skills to overcome a certain puzzle, obstacle or boss and equipping her with the most useful power-up. Of course, it doesn't hurt that the game looks as good as it does either.

» NAIOUS

■ DEVELOPER: EXACT ■ YEAR: 1990

■ *Naious* is an X68000 exclusive with a definite *Thunder Force* vibe to its mechanics but original visuals and stage layouts. *Naious*'s twist is that it has tight spaces to navigate under pressure.



» PITAPAT

■ DEVELOPER: FILL-IN CAFE ■ YEAR: 1992

■ Cross *Boulder Dash* with *Bejewelled* and you get *PitaPat*. You play a rabbit pushing coloured tiles around to make rows of four, which then disappear. It's simple, but enjoyable.

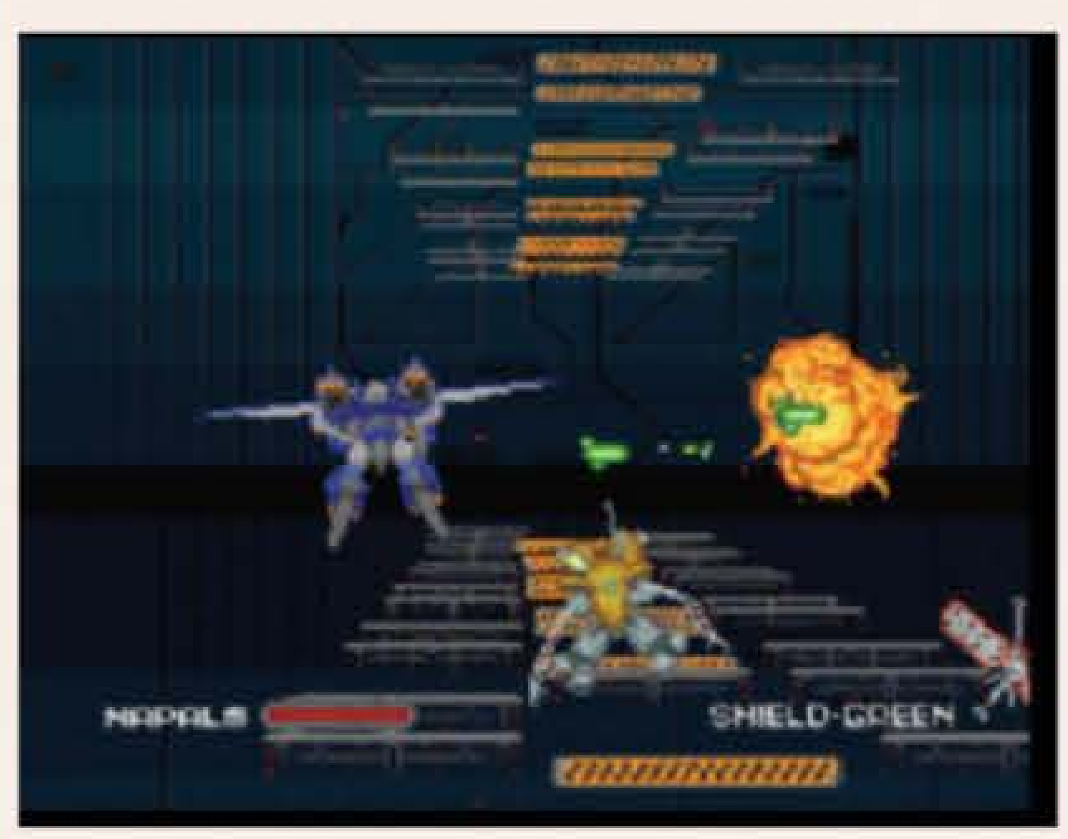




» NIKO 2

■ DEVELOPER: WOLF TEAM ■ YEAR: 1991

■ **In the West,** Wolf Team is likely better known for developing *Sol-Feace*, but the studio also created *Niko 2*, a strange but highly-addictive game. You play one of two competing rabbits that have to deflect the most coloured balls from a central stream into their goal to win. To do so you lay bricks or stand in the stream. You can also temporarily stun your antagonist, leaving them at the mercy of a creature that inflates rabbits. This inflation results in a huge rabbit that moves slowly but can lay huge bricks, which helps the disadvantaged party slightly. *Niko 2* may be bizarre, but its simple premise is a compulsive one.



» METAL SIGHT

■ DEVELOPER: TEAM CROSS WONDER ■ YEAR: 1989

■ ***Metal Sight* was** Team Cross Wonder's only release, but two years later the studio renamed itself Fill-In Cafe and became quite a prolific developer. As debut titles go, *Metal Sight* is an impressive piece of work that riffs off *Space Harrier* and *After Burner*, but has its own unique style. Pre-game, you choose a member of a crack military team to pilot an airborne mech armed with napalm. This weaponry helps combat the machine army you face, but not the chrome scaffolding and other obstacles that block your path. *Metal Sight* is a stiff test of dexterity and reflexes and a title that would have done well in the arcades.



» OVERTAKE

■ DEVELOPER: ZOOM INC ■ YEAR: 1992

■ **Zoom's take on** F1 racing, *Overtake* is every bit as polished as you would expect from a firm so in-tune with the hardware. Aside from nailing the sensation of speed, *Overtake*'s destinations are beautifully rendered and your driver's movements of the wheel and clutch are realistically animated. *Overtake*'s sound effects are like a wall of sound and help you feel every bend and undulation of each track, and the game is licensed so there are no made-up drivers or constructors. The driving in *Overtake* also has quite a realistic feel, but it doesn't adhere to physics so strictly that the game becomes impossible.

GEOGRAPH SEAL

■ DEVELOPER: EXACT ■ YEAR: 1994

■ **Exact is probably best known for its *Jumping Flash!* series, the first entry of which was a PlayStation launch game.** However, *Geograph Seal* – one of its earlier X68000 titles – can be seen as something of a forerunner to *Jumping Flash!*, although the two games share little in terms of gameplay.

Where *Jumping Flash!* is a gentle first-person platformer where you shoot at slow-moving targets, *Geograph Seal* is a high-octane shooter with almost no platforming. What the two games do share in common is a clever jumping mechanism, which in *Jumping Flash!* lets you collect power-ups but in *Geograph Seal* allows you to squash your foes. This last action is the key to levelling-up and is no easy feat to perform while under fire. It is a little less difficult than the end-of-level bosses, though, which don't quite create first-person bullet hell but aren't far off. In fact, the game presents a stiff challenge throughout, possibly because – unlike *Jumping Flash!* – *Geograph Seal* was a Japanese exclusive.

Graphically, *Geograph Seal* hasn't aged that badly, almost certainly because everything in the title is built from geometric shapes constructed with shaded polygons, which gives the game an iconic look. Everything moves at speed too, which is impressive given the smooth animation, and the title's sound effects are suitably upbeat and intense. But, more importantly, *Geograph Seal*'s core mechanic of leaping skyward while raining down ammo at targets below before stamping on anything left standing still delivers a thrill.



■ [X68000] Leaping skyward before stamping on anything left standing in *Geograph Seal*.

» HELLHOUND

■ DEVELOPER: BREAKTHROUGH ■ YEAR: 1990

■ Clearly, *Hellhound* takes its cue from *Gradius*, but it brings huge sprites, voice samples and a synth score to the party. Power-ups also become pleasingly over-the-top.



» STAR MOBILE

■ DEVELOPER: MNM SOFTWARE ■ YEAR: 1991

■ It shouldn't have lasting appeal, but *Star Mobile* is curiously addictive. You have to balance a set number of falling stars on a set of scales to level-up, which is simple to learn, but hard to master.





» ASUKA 120% BURNING FEST

■ DEVELOPER: FILL-IN CAFE ■ YEAR: 1994

■ **The *Asuka Vs*** series graced various systems during its run, but the original was designed for the FM Towns and the X68000. Interestingly, Masatoshi Imaizumi – developer of the X68000 *Asuka* – now works on the *Phantom Breaker* series, which many consider to be *Asuka*'s spiritual successor. Asuka is a student at a school for girls. The game's plot is set during the school's annual martial arts tournament, with each girl's moves reflecting the club they belong to. Given the game's theme you might expect a tame fighter, but be advised, *Asuka* doesn't take prisoners.



» LAST BATTALION

■ DEVELOPER: STING ENTERTAINMENT ■ YEAR: 1991

■ **The PC Engine** version of *Last Battalion* was called *Override* and was published by Data East. When it came to developing the X68000 port of the shoot-'em-up, Sting decided on a rename. Sting also overhauled the bosses, created new backdrops and upgraded the original's graphics to take advantage of the X68000's more powerful hardware. In other respects, *Last Battalion* retains the elements that made *Override* an interesting shooter: you get three hit points – meaning a hit degrades your weapons rather than costing a life and time spent not firing charges a second weapon. But *Last Battalion*'s visuals and sound give it the edge over *Override*.



» DIE BAHNWELT

■ DEVELOPER: GLODIA ■ YEAR: 1992

■ ***Die Bahnwelt* looks** like a generic sci-fi shooter, but there's actually a lot more to it than pretty visuals and blasting. You're followed by a second character, an AI-controlled sidekick that you can order to adopt various battle tactics depending on the situation you find yourselves in. As you progress through the game you come across different characters that become your new sidekick, each with their own personality, which they express through superimposed cut-scenes. *Die Bahnwelt* does feature plenty of gunplay as well, but you spend as much time finding power for your various weapons and navigating the game's complex maze structures.

Knights of the Sky

Microprose's tribute to early air warfare remains one of the most playable flight combat games ever created. Mike Bevan speaks to Jeff Briggs about recreating those magnificent men in their flying machines



IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** MICROPROSE

» **DEVELOPER:** MICROPROSE

» **RELEASED:** 1990

» **PLATFORM:** PC DOS, AMIGA, ATARI ST, PC98

» **GENRE:** FLIGHT SIMULATION



Despite their popularity over the years, it's probably fair to say that early flight simulation programs were often a little impenetrable for beginners. Given the lack of computing power of Eighties systems, many were slow with crude wire-frame graphics, featuring complicated manuals filled with dozens of key commands to memorise. An emphasis on basing games around the intricacies of jet combat also meant that encounters amounted to firing lock-on weapons at tiny pixels in the distance, somewhat diminishing the adrenaline-rush of the close-range dogfight. Although the earliest version of *Microsoft Flight Simulator* had included a crudely modelled Sopwith Camel, before 1990 no one had really looked at the possibility of building a flight combat game solely based around the Great War of 1914-18, where wooden crates held together with fabric and piano-wire did battle above the trenches of Northern France. A game, perhaps, where players could pick up the joystick and become quickly engrossed in an epic cat-and-mouse dogfight, where your adversary was often never more than a few hundred feet away from riddling you with bullets.

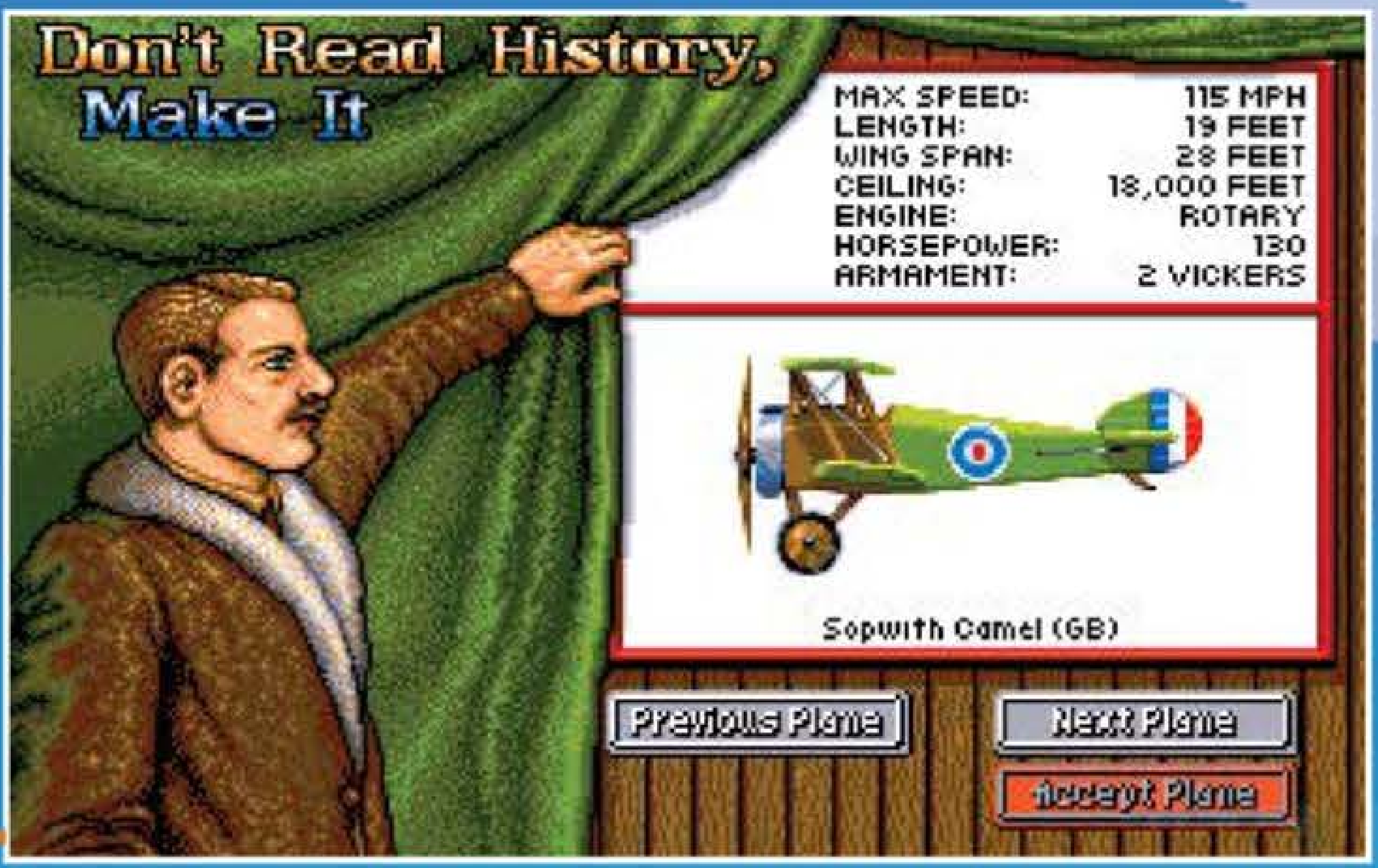
Microprose was a company that had been formed on the strength of flight simulator programs like Sid Meier's *Solo Flight* and *Spitfire Ace*. As home-computing power had evolved, Sid had moved on to hi-tech PC (and Amiga) titles like *F-14 Strike Eagle, F-19 Stealth Fighter* and *Gunship*. But another Microprose designer, Jeff Briggs, had the idea for a back-to-basics approach, convincing Sid of the potential of theming a new game around close-range dogfights. "*F15* and *F19* were complex because the planes were complex," says Jeff. "They had HUDs and lots of dials— that actually mattered to the player, and that he had to pay attention to in order to succeed. The great thing about WWI aviation is that it was a man and machine and a gun and that's about it. The idea of simply pointing your plane toward



» [Amiga] The charming black-and-white Amiga intro, complete with jaunty ragtime soundtrack.



» [Amiga] On the tail of an enemy Albatross.



» [Amiga] The aircraft selection screen.



"The idea of simply pointing your plane toward the target and flying while pulling the trigger was very cool to me"
Jeff Briggs

the target and flying while pulling the trigger was very cool to me."

One thing that was important to Jeff from the start was that the new game should be as authentic as possible to the era. "I was only familiar [with WWI history] to the extent that I knew biplanes and triplanes had been used," Jeff admits. "I did a lot of research into the war generally, the Western Front mainly, and the air war specifically. I managed to get hold of lots of books with a surprising amount of detail about engines, weights and machine-guns etc. I remember being stunned to learn that the machine-gun breakthrough was the synchronisation of the firing mechanism with the propeller, allowing the bullets to fly through without chewing the blades to pieces. We also went to the Air and Space Museum, and flight shows where the old planes were still flown."

As Jeff points out though, historic WWI planes were decidedly more complicated to model using the primitive computer power of PCs of the day, more so than the modern jet fighters of other Microprose games. And aside from its dogfights, *Knights Of The Sky* was even more ambitious in attempting to render a large chunk of the Western Front, complete with trenches, barrage balloons, ground targets and aerodromes. "We had to decide early on where we were going to spend our polygon budget and the planes themselves deserved the lion's share, so every other aspect of the 3D graphics had to take a back seat," Jeff tell us. "This was painful to me as the designer because I had to build all the terrain, and I wanted it to look just like the real world. So I was never satisfied with how the game looked. In those days you really had to be willing to let your mind fill in a lot of the detail…"

"The 3D engine was based upon the other 3D PC flight sims [that Microprose] had done previously, but the flight sim engine itself was remade from scratch," Jeff reveals. "When we first developed the game we were trying to make it feel like a real dogfighting experience. And we were shocked to learn exactly how hard it was to actually shoot down another plane… So we started a slow tweaking of the bullet size – that is the actual dimensions of the bullets that come out of the player's barrels. We learned that even tripling the size of ▶

FLYING BY WIRE

Andrew Parton on multiplayer fun

An added bonus of *Knights Of The Sky* was the addition of a modem link-up mode, giving two players the opportunity to go head-to-head in a WWI dogfight encounter of their choosing. "This was a bit ahead of its time," says Jeff. "We had some tremendously talented and smart engineers working on this stuff so it was not particularly troublesome to implement. At Microprose, we talked a lot about 'early fun', that is, having a lot of people in the company playing the game a lot and having fun early in development. The two-player game caught on really fast around the office and people were playing at any opportunity. We used this mode of play a lot for testing flight characteristics and discovering what players wanted to do."

"Technically, getting the serial link working at all was a bit of a nightmare, if I remember correctly," says Andrew Parton when asked about the Amiga version's two-player mode. "We're talking 1,200 baud modems here, and getting all the required information across in such small bandwidth was quite the challenge. We were very proud of it in the end though, despite the regular line drop-outs, which often made the opponent's plane teleport alarming distances in the middle of a dogfight."

"The game shipped with a frame rate that at times really did get in the way of gameplay," admits Kevin Buckner. "But, in that era we were pushing hardware very hard, sometimes beyond breaking point. The technical programmers did a fantastic job though, and the game remains one of my favourites."



» [Amiga] Some interesting gossip in the Officer's Mess.



» [Amiga] Take that you Fokker!



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SOLO FLIGHT
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1983

F-15 STRIKE EAGLE
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1985

FORMULA ONE GRAND PRIX
(PICTURED)
SYSTEM: ATARI ST
YEAR: 1992

▶ these bullets didn't help much… I think the final bullets were roughly the size of school buses!"

One impressive feature of the game was the ability to enter into quick dogfight encounters in 20 different Allied and German fighters, from Sopwith Camels and Snipes to French Spads, German Albatrosses and Fokker triplanes. "Scott Spanburg (one of those unsung geniuses of early 3D programming) worked long and hard to get the flight characteristics [of each aircraft] to feel right," says Jeff. "He did this by modelling flight characteristics realistically, and we quickly learned how under-powered these 'kites' were, too. Dogfights often devolved into massive turning battles that bled altitude and potential energy, and could easily lead to, ahem, 'ground collisions…'"

Perhaps the best feature of the single-player game though was playing through the dynamic mission-based campaign as an Allied pilot across the whole World War One timeline. Players would start out in primitive Nieuports and Sopwith Pups and gain more advanced planes as the arms race with Germany ensued, watching the position of no-man's land shift throughout the course of the conflict. Shooting down enough enemy planes gained the respect of German Aces, finally gaining the attention of Baron Von Richtofen's flying circus. If you fancied, you could fly over to an enemy airstrip and drop a note to issue a challenge to the likes of Werner Voss or Max Immelman. This could result in either a headline-grabbing victory, or getting downed behind enemy lines, before being respectfully wined and dined by your opponent and escaping back to your aerodrome.



"I wanted the world in *Knights Of The Sky* to feel alive in the player's mind," says Jeff, "like things were actually going on in the world other than the player and his individual missions. So we had these interim episodes between missions where he player would pick up rumours about what was happening on the rest of the front. The player would hear rumours about other pilots, big events in the war, and even overhear what people were saying about him as a pilot. This naturally led to the idea that the player would begin hearing things about important enemy Aces – particularly where they are located on the front so that, if the player was paying attention, he could 'go rogue' while flying a mission and fly off to see if he can scare up the braggart and shoot his ass down. Eventually, these Aces would begin issuing challenges and wind up finding the player themselves. And all the enemy Aces had their own skills and weaknesses…"

One aspect of simulating the spit and sealing-wax nature of primitive fighter planes that has caused more than its fair share of cursing and frustration from *KOTS* players over the years was the inclusion of in-game gun jams. "Actually this was a bone of contention from the start, and ultimately I wish we had turned it way down or eliminated it altogether," Jeff admits. "I learned that players rarely enjoy that level of uncertainty. It always seems like a good idea but players feel like the program cheated them out of a victory… Sorry."

Rounding out the package was a brilliant two-player link-up mode [see Flying by Wire boxout] along with a beautifully put-together manual, with stacks of fascinating information about the planes, aerial manoeuvres and history of the era, and a fold-out operational map of Northern France and Flanders. While the PC version was developed by Jeff and his team in the US, the popular Amiga version of *Knights Of The Sky*, released a year later, was programmed at Microprose's UK headquarters in Tetbury. "The choice of location was largely down to familiarity with the chosen platform," says programmer Kevin Buckner. "The US guys were soaked in PC and to a lesser degree Mac, but we were all over computers such as the Amiga and the Atari ST"

Another of the Amiga version's coders, Andrew Parton, had coincidentally previously worked on another biplane-themed title, Firebird's C64 port of *Flying Shark*. "We loved the PC game and played it to death while we were working out how the hell we were going to do it on an Amiga," he admits. "Neither Kevin nor I had done any 3D programming before, and were getting '3D Graphics 101s' from one of the guys who worked on the *F117A* and *F-15* ports. The PC game was written in C, and I had never even seen C before; I was strictly an old-school assembly programmer, so it was quite a learning experience. Getting the 3D graphics to work at any reasonable speed was a challenge. In the end, I think we achieved all we could… it was amazing on an



» [Amiga] Leading an attack on a barrage balloon above the trenches.



» [Amiga] The odds of surviving the war in the single-player campaign were incredibly slim – as in real life.

Amiga 3000… faster than *Red Baron* too! I also created the opening title animation sequence (with the late, great Steve Cain on graphics), and wrote the music."

"My priority on that project was fuelled by my determination to add more life to the battle raging on the ground below," adds Kevin. "The PC version fabulous in its own right, but I took static objects such as convoys of trucks and attempted to bring them to life by making them a moving target. I probably went too far by adding brake-lights to the back of the trucks, but it all added to the sense of life on the ground and not just in the sky. The whole team put so much blood, sweat and tears into that game that it was a real mix of relief and joy to see it being appreciated the way it was."

The Amiga version of *Knights Of The Sky* met with an equally good, if not better, critical reception than the PC original, with reviews noting the intuitiveness of its flight model, and praising the thrills of its low-speed, close-range dogfighting. In 1996, long-time admirers *Amiga Power* ranked *KOTS* tenth on its final list of best Amiga games of all time, sandwiching it between *Speedball 2* and *The Chaos Engine*. "We were amazed and very pleased at the reception," reflects Andrew thoughtfully. "We had put a lot of very long days into the game. In fact, over time, we gradually started working nights and slept during the day (less interruptions… and the pool table was always free). I've still got all the magazine reviews in a box in the attic. I'll have to dig them out one day, and smile…"

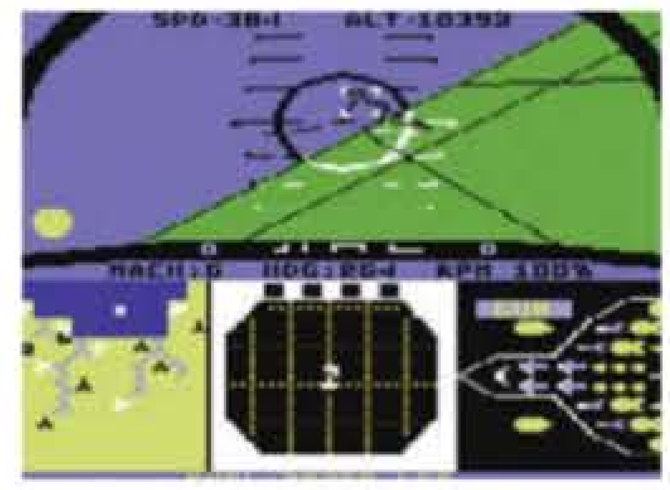
TAKING FLIGHT

The combat simulators you need to play



SPITFIRE ACE 1983

■ A sequel to Sid Meier's first combat flight sim *Hellcat Ace*, although graphically crude, for its time *Spitfire Ace* was a respectable mix of arcade-action and simulation, as you took on Luftwaffe fighters over London, North Africa and Germany. Another spin-off, the Korean War-themed *Mig Alley Ace*, went on to add an innovative two-player split-screen mode.



F-15 STRIKE EAGLE 1985

■ One of Microprose's biggest selling flight simulators, shifting a staggering 1.5 million copies, *F-15 Strike Eagle* was another title to benefit from the design expertise of Sid Meier. A big step up from games like *Spitfire Ace*, it featured flight characteristics based on real-world data, plenty of high-tech weaponry and both carrier and land-based missions.



F/A-18 INTERCEPTOR 1988

■ A spectacular early showcase for 3D polygon graphics on the Amiga, Electronic Arts' jet simulation featured an impressive representation of San Francisco's Bay Area, allowing players to fly dramatically past skyscrapers and under the Golden Gate Bridge. Notably, the game was coded by ex-Midway employee Bob Dinnerman, designer of *Discs Of Tron*.



REACH FOR THE SKIES 1992

■ Cheshire-based developer Rowan Software made its name in the flight sim market with titles like *Dawn Patrol* and *Overlord*. With *Reach For The Skies* it created one of the all-time great WWII flight combat games, allowing players to take to the air in a suitably epic dynamic campaign set across the whole period of the Battle of Britain.



BIRDS OF PREY 1992

■ Developed by *Starwing* creator Argonaut, *Birds Of Prey* was the company's only true flight simulation, but it was certainly a very ambitious one. Its main draw was the opportunity to pilot 40 different jets, including some never seen in flight sims before like the Blackbird spy plane and the giant Russian Antonev transport, in an involving real-time campaign.



TFX 1993

■ On its release *TFX* (or Tactical Fighter Experiment) was simply the most gorgeous looking flight sim around, with beautifully shaded plane models and landscape features, and effects like contrails and realistic looking clouds. It gave players the chance to fly three state-of-the-art aircraft – the Lockheed F-22, F-117A Stealth Fighter and Eurofighter 2000.



IMPORT ONLY

GAME ORIGIN



- » COUNTRY: JAPAN
- » POPULATION: 127 MILLION
- » CAPITAL: TOKYO
- » NATIONAL LANGUAGE: JAPANESE
- » CURRENCY: YEN
- » TIME ZONE: UTC+9

» CO-ORDINATES: 35°41' N 139°46' E

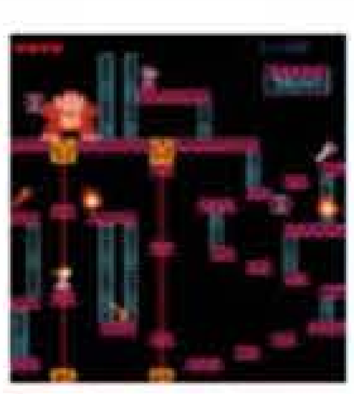
INFO



- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **DEVELOPER:** HAL LABORATORY
- » **SYSTEM:** SNES
- » **ALSO ON:** N/A
- » **GENRE:** PLATFORMER
- » **RELEASED:** 1998
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £20-£25

EVOLUTION OF THE GENRE

▲ Retro



DONKEY KONG
RELEASED: **1981**
Hopping platforms is the domain of Nintendo's most celebrated star, Mario – and he got his start here. The third stage in particular gives Mario a workout, with moving platforms and falls from height joining the range of hazards. Over 30 years later, he's still on top of his genre.

▼ Modern



THE LEGENDARY STARFY
RELEASED: **2009**
Kirby got his start on the Game Boy, and while 2D platformers still exist on home consoles they've been much more prevalent on handhelds in recent years. *The Legendary Starfy* was the first English language release for the series, which has remained exclusive to Nintendo's portable hardware.

KIRBY'S DREAM LAND 3

» IT DOESN'T MATTER HOW BIG THE SERIES – EVEN MAJOR GAMING FRANCHISES FEATURE ENTRIES THAT SLIP BETWEEN THE CRACKS AND MISS REGIONAL RELEASES. NICK THORPE REVISITS THE KIRBY ADVENTURE THAT NEVER MADE IT TO EUROPE



» [SNES] Some of Kirby's copied abilities have uses beyond attacking – this umbrella shields him from falling coconuts.

Please understand that we're not talking about you when we say this, dear readers, but gamers are quick to abandon their old hardware. Too many good games have fallen victim to their status as last-generation software as shiny new machines arrived, from *Comix Zone* to *Drill Dozer*, and it makes us sick. These underdogs deserve recognition, and one particular series seems to have been given this rough treatment more than any other – *Kirby*. When the SNES was already a few years old, *Kirby's Adventure* launched on the ageing NES, and *Kirby 64* reached the shelves while the gaming world was gripped by PlayStation 2 fever. But those two at least got worldwide releases. *Kirby's Dream Land 3* wasn't quite so lucky.

Kirby's Dream Land 3 wasn't just released in the twilight years of the SNES – it became the final Nintendo-developed game to receive a North American release when it arrived late in 1997, before hitting the shelves in its native country early in 1998. As expected, it failed to make much of an impact with an audience preoccupied with the 3D consoles that had come to dominate the market. This is a shame, because it's a strikingly pretty platformer which, unlike so many of those early polygonal games, has held up well over the years.

Following on from the first two entries in the *Dream Land* series on the Game Boy, this release starts off with the invasion of Dark Matter, an alien race that has possessed many of Dream Land's inhabitants, including Kirby's archenemy King Dedede. Fortunately, Kirby and his six animal friends are unaffected and decide that they'd best do something about the invasion, setting off on a journey across 30 stages.

The principle means of doing this will be familiar to fans of Kirby's adventures – as usual, his primary means of attack is to open his mouth and inhale enemies, which can then be spat back at enemies as a further attack. Alternatively Kirby can swallow inhaled enemies, which allows him to steal their abilities and attack in different ways. Further enhancing Kirby's repertoire is the ability to team up with the animal friends he meets along the way, altering the stolen abilities. Just mixing and matching



» [SNES] You'll need to explore to find all of the hidden areas – dropping from the main path is necessary here.

“In a time when the supply of quality 2D platformers was at its lowest, Kirby's Dream Land 3 was a treat for gamers”

these combinations is great fun. Also, Kirby's odd-looking friend Gooey can be summoned at the cost of a little health. He can be controlled by a second player for co-op action or deployed as an effective AI drone.

The stages are a joy to play, too. While much of the game is fairly standard in its approach to platforming, there are some exciting segments – dropping down platforms as enemies charge down next to you, battling against the current in underwater stages and mini-game intermissions. Each stage also has plenty of secrets to find, including doors that are hidden, as well as a secret mission. These secret missions range from defeating mini-bosses to stomping wildlife, and must be completed to face the final boss.

Speaking of bosses, the battles you'll face at the end of each stage are well designed. They range from classic Kirby enemies such as the tree Whispy, to new foes like the fox and raccoon duo Pon and Con. A particular favourite is Acro, the killer whale at the end of the second stage who starts off at a disadvantage before turning the tables by plunging into the water, where he's able to attack by spitting out skulls, anchors and even smaller whales.

Thanks to its status as a late SNES release, *Kirby's Dream Land 3* is a visual feast. Kirby himself takes on a hand-drawn appearance, with shading lines shifting within him as he moves. The stages will hold your attention for the duration of the game too, as the variety of themes really allowed the artists to go to town with the pastels. The game also takes advantage of hardware tricks, achieving transparency effects with the use of the pseudo-high resolution mode of the SNES. This allows for some stunning moments, such as a section set inside a tree where transparent leaves gradually cover the foreground as Kirby climbs. If you're looking for an antidote to the muted tones popular in today's games, this is your multi-coloured medicine.

Kirby's Dream Land 3 stands out because of the time in which it was released. 2D platformers had fallen out of fashion by the late Nineties, a circumstance brought about by technological development as well as the genre's market saturation. While it's a shame that the game never made it to UK shores, it isn't a huge surprise. But in a time when the supply of quality 2D platformers was at its lowest, *Kirby's Dream Land 3* was a treat for gamers whose interests weren't dictated by what was popular.

However, the game is more than just an unusual release. It's not a groundbreaking design and it's not the hardest game – particularly as there's a trick to provide infinite health, involving summoning and re-absorbing Gooey when your health is low. But beyond those minor quibbles, *Kirby's Dream Land 3* is a high-quality platformer that provides players with plenty to do and pushes the SNES to produce some of its finest visuals.

Thankfully, Nintendo's Virtual Console service provided a second chance for a lot of games that had previously missed their journey to the UK, with the company releasing import-only games during its Hanabi Festival events. *Kirby's Dream Land 3* was one of the games selected, so for owners of the Wii and Wii U there's no longer an import barrier – you have a cheap and easy way of picking up this overlooked gem.

CAN'T IMPORT? YOU COULD TRY



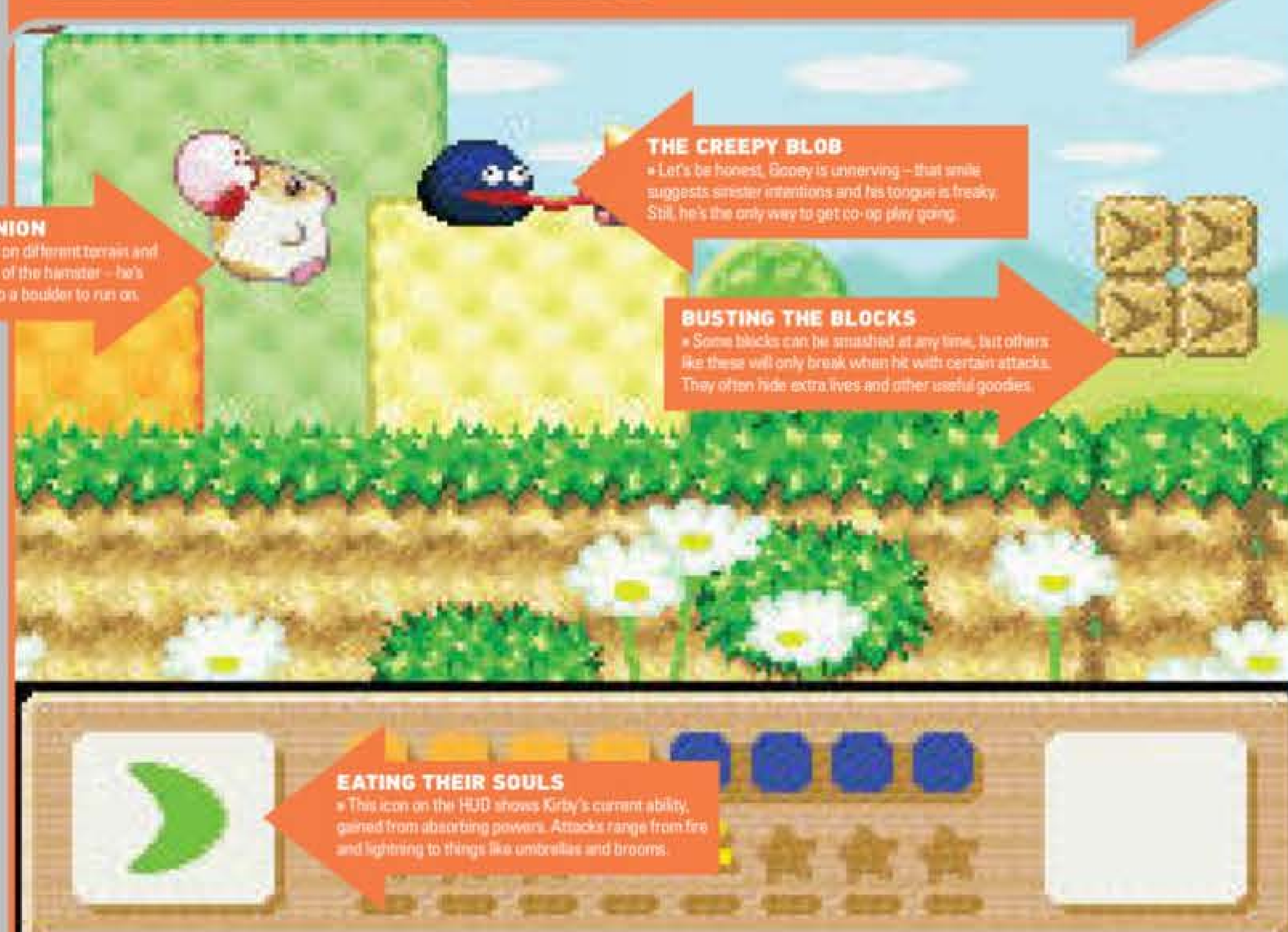
KIRBY'S FUN PAK

» Advertised as eight games in one, *Kirby's Fun Pak* plays with the pink puffball's traditions to produce a series of mini-games. Many of them include the platforming that Kirby is best known for, with one even serving as a remake of the original *Kirby's Dream Land*. Other games see Kirby racing his nemesis King Dedede, taking on a series of bosses and even punching cracks into the planet. It's one of the most popular games in the series, and deservedly so. Pick this one up if you can't import, but it's worthwhile even if you can.



» [SNES] Underwater areas show off the game's visual trickery well, with transparent objects often floating in the foreground.

GO DEEPER Life's a dream





The Bluffer's guide to

REAL-TIME STR

Real-time strategy has conquered the hearts and minds of players and become a cornerstone of PC gaming, but it wasn't always the staple genre that it is today. Nick Thorpe charts the evolution of the real-time strategy game, from inauspicious beginnings to million-dollar tournaments



ATEGY

KNOW YOUR REAL-TIME STRATEGY

FOG OF WAR
■ Fog of war affects areas that are not currently under observation by friendly units, rendering enemy units and neutral resource points invisible to the player.

TECH TREE
■ A hierarchy of potential technologies, each dependent on prerequisite developments such as production buildings, lower-level technologies or certain unit types.

RUSH
■ A strategy which utilises speed and surprise in an attempt to overwhelm the opponent before significant defences have been established.

MULTIPLAYER ONLINE BATTLE ARENA
■ A subgenre in which teams fight to destroy bases, with players each receiving control over a single powerful character.

TURTLING
■ A strategy which involves concentrating all of your resources on defensive strategies, at the expense of territorial expansion and gathering attacking forces.

REAL-TIME TACTICS
■ A subgenre which concentrates predominantly on battle simulation, without wider strategic concerns such as resource management.

Bluffer's guide

While videogames are a relatively recent invention, some genres can lay claim to a rich history that predates the medium – and real-time strategy games definitely can. Military strategy games as we recognise them today date back to the late 18th Century. These were largely used as training tools – the Prussian army's game Kriegsspiel was developed during the 19th Century, and later became popular among the major military powers as Prussia won a series of victories. Consumer games began to be published at the end of the 19th Century, with the likes of HG Wells's *Little Wars* and Fifties board games such as *Diplomacy* and *Risk* achieving great popularity, before a boom in the Seventies which peaked with the release of Avalon Hill's *Squad Leader*.

Traditional war games provided a natural starting point for developers when videogames arrived, so early strategy titles such as Walter Bright's 1977 game *Empire* shared many of the key concepts of those games – grid-based maps, turn-based gameplay and more. The first signs of a shift away from these influences came in 1981, when *Utopia* was released for the Intellivision. Designed by Don Daglow, the game saw two players taking charge of competing island nations, attempting to strengthen their own island by building farms and boats while scuppering the opponent by funding rebel activity and sinking their boats. Though still turn-based, *Utopia* included time-limited turns, forcing players to act quickly in order to succeed.

Precursors to the modern real-time strategy genre appeared sporadically throughout the Eighties, taking different directions around the world. In the UK, John Gibson created *Stonkers*, a 1983 Spectrum title which developed the military tactics aspect of the genre by giving the player control of differing unit types which required regular resupply. *Bokosuka Wars*, a title which appeared on popular computer formats in Japan, enabled players to take direct control of a commanding unit on the map, with allied units moving in formation around it. *The Ancient Art Of War*, a 1984 release originating from the USA, introduced further aspects such as troop morale, which could be affected by hunger, long-distance marching and continuous battle.



» [ZX Spectrum] Early games like *Stonkers* had to convey complex concepts with very limited visuals – that purple splodge is your base.

However, it wouldn't be until the late Eighties that the genre as we know it would finally take shape. *Nether Earth*, a 1987 release for the Spectrum, C64 and Amstrad, finally combined resource management with battle tactics to produce a game that fits the mould of a real-time strategy game. The game involves building robots to battle the enemy Insignian robots and take control of buildings – factories that supply resources and war bases that build robots. Robots were capable of executing a variety of orders and could be built from different parts, enabling a variety of unit types. However, while *Nether*



» [Amiga] *Dune II* popularised the harvesting method of resource gathering, with players battling to acquire the orange-coloured spice.



» [Amiga] Real-time tactics games such as *Syndicate* forego base building and resource gathering, concentrating on combat tactics.

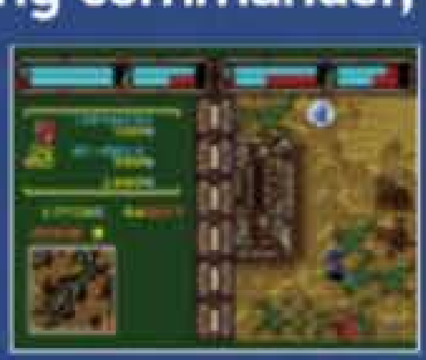
FIVE ESSENTIAL GAMES

If you're an aspiring commander, these are the key targets for your initial conquests



UTOPIA
■ 1981 ■ INTELLIVISION

While *Utopia* is a turn-based game, the very earliest ideas that shaped the real-time strategy genre can be found here – adding a timer provided a major change from earlier strategy releases. There's little else like it on consoles of the era, and it remains a compelling multiplayer title.



HERZOG ZWEI
■ 1989 ■ MEGA DRIVE

Herzog Zwei is historically important, influencing the development of the games that would popularise the genre. It's not just a museum piece though, as its unusual control system and high quality still distinguish it from the rest of the crowd. Just make sure to bring a friend – the AI is no great challenge.



COMMAND & CONQUER
■ 1995 ■ VARIOUS

Command & Conquer popularised real-time strategy, introducing many players to the genre and selling millions of copies over the years. The original conflict between GDI and Brotherhood of Nod is still great fun to play, and easy to acquire as EA released it as freeware in 2007.



WARCRAFT III
■ 2002 ■ PC/MAC

Warcraft III is a fantastically well-made game that added powerful Hero units to the mix, differentiating itself from the crowd. Beyond the main game, the modding scene truly brought *Warcraft III* to life, with a multitude of maps extending the life of the game and even spinning off new genres.



STARCRAFT II
■ 2010 ■ PC/MAC

As the most critically-acclaimed real-time strategy release of recent times, *StarCraft II* is essential for players seeking to understand the current state of the genre. It's the most popular real-time strategy game in tournament play at present too, so there could be money in it if you're good.

» [PlayStation] *Warzone 2100* allowed you to take direct control of tank battalions.



» [PC] Discovering an enemy base can be impressive and terrifying, though we're clearly winning here.



» [PC] *Age Of Empires* expanded the long-term strategy found in the turn-based *Civilization* series

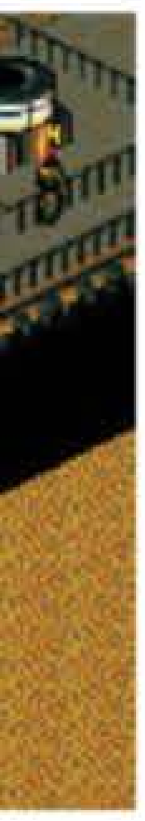


Earth's Spectrum version is recognised as one of the great games on the format, its unique combination of mechanics didn't catch on and the genre stalled for a couple of years.

New hardware brought new opportunities, and the advent of 16-bit machines would drive the genre forward considerably with two key titles in 1989. Nick Bruty, designer of *Supremacy: Your Will Be Done*, remembers the transition well: "I think [my first real-time strategy game] was Peter Molyneux's *Populous* on the Amiga. There hadn't been a great deal of isometric games and being from the UK it took the Amiga and Atari ST to turn up just so we could have a mouse! Imagine playing RTS with just a keyboard."

Designed by Peter Molyneux and released initially for the Amiga, *Populous* saw players take control of a god whose goal was to aid his followers in eliminating the followers of enemy gods. Manipulating the environment as much as the followers themselves, creating flat land for your followers enabled your followers to build houses, growing the population and providing mana for divine interventions such as earthquakes, floods and volcanic eruptions. *Populous* was well-received by the press and converted to a variety of other systems, inspiring games such as Sensible Software's *Mega-Lo-Mania*, and Molyneux would go on to explore the genre further in the years to come.

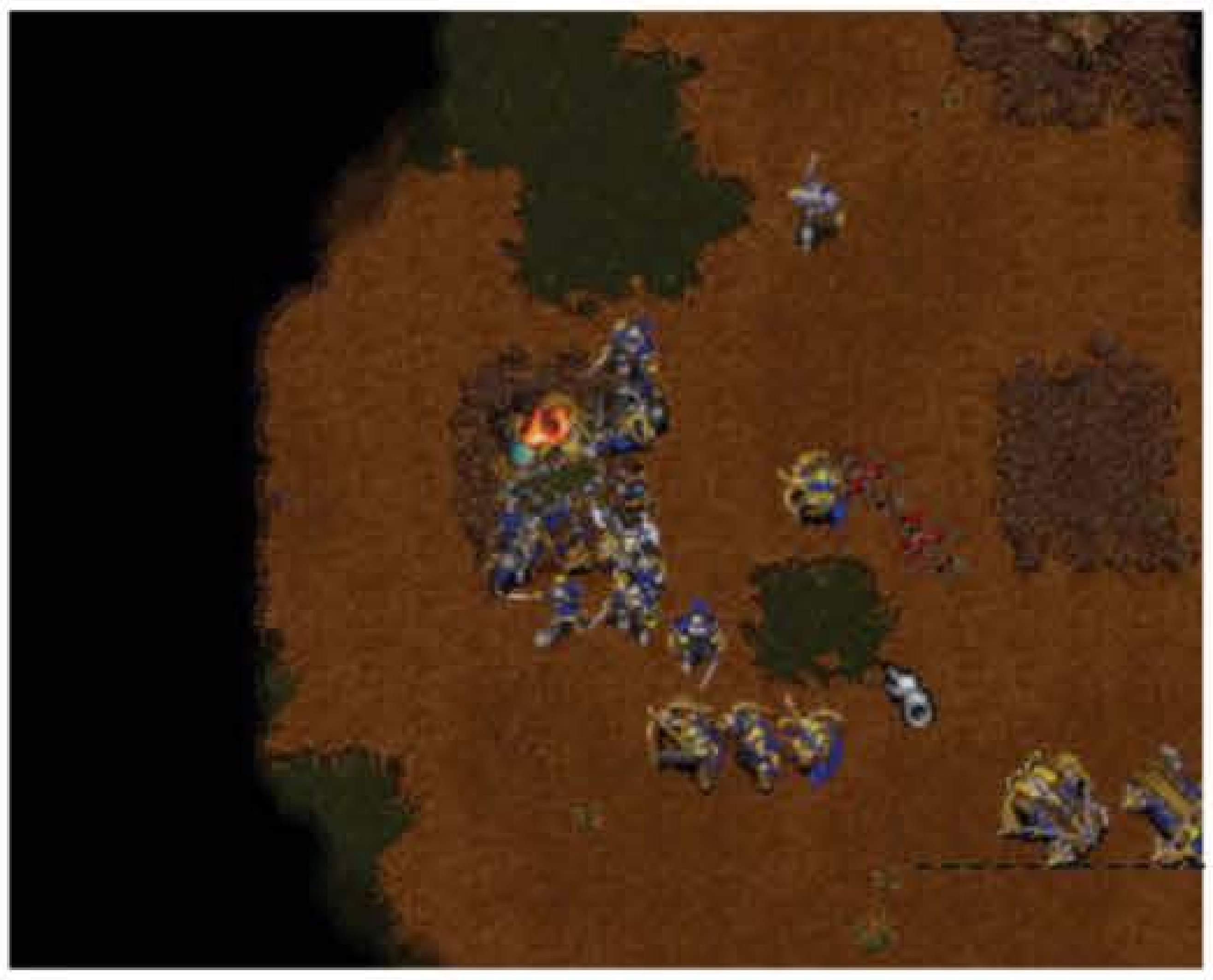
Meanwhile in Japan, Technosoft's Mega Drive classic *Herzog Zwei* saw players take control of a transforming command vehicle, capable of deploying friendly units as well as attacking enemy units. Building units, capturing bases and destroying the enemy were the key objectives. The game was an unusual Mega Drive release, with the strategic action standing alone in a field of arcade games. This wasn't lost on reviewers at the time of its release, who commented on this as well as the game's steep learning curve. Critical reception at the time was generally warm but sales were slow as the game received little marketing.



While standards were being set for the genre, at this stage the field was still open for radically different approaches. *Supremacy: Your Will Be Done* is a case in point. "We made the game by the seat of our pants without much of a plan. We had never made a strategy game before, we had a very loose concept and just built upon that," recalls Nick. Instead of a map-based battle system, all the action took place by proxy via a menu system. Real-time alerts arrived in text form, requiring the player to take immediate action. "When I checked it out on YouTube to refresh myself I was surprised to see how orderly and cohesive it ended up, if a little dense. It seems deeper than I remembered so maybe we helped push the genre a little deeper in that direction."

The next major shift in the genre came from Westwood Studios. In the early Nineties, Virgin Interactive Entertainment had acquired the *Dune* movie licence and contracted Cryo to produce an adventure game. However, progress was slow and Virgin made the decision to cancel Cryo's game and make a new game using the licence. At the same time, *Herzog Zwei* had become popular in the office at Virgin. Driven by the idea that the core conflict in *Dune* was the battle to control the spice, producer Stephen Clarke-Willson asked Westwood Studios to produce a resource-based strategy game – and crucially, to look at Technosoft's game for ideas. Cryo hadn't been told that its game had been cancelled and when it returned with *Dune*, Westwood's game became *Dune II*. ▶

"In the UK it took the Amiga and the ST to turn up just so we could have a mouse!"
Nick Bruty



» [PlayStation] *Warcraft II*'s fantasy theme saw the typical tanks and gunners replaced with arbalests and archers

SELECTED TIMELINE

UTOPIA
1981
■ Timed rounds are introduced to turn-based strategy gameplay, adding a new element of pressure to the genre.

1982

STONKERS
1983
■ John Gibson's military strategy title introduces Spectrum owners to real-time tactical combat. Just don't go near the bridge...

1984



1985

1986

1987

1988

POPULOUS
1989
■ The original god game makes a star of Peter Molyneux and introduces thousands of gamers to real-time strategy.

1990

MEGA-LO-MANIA
1991
■ Sensible Software's god game provides a real-time counterpart to the technological development of *Sid Meier's Civilization*.

DUNE II: BATTLE FOR ARRAKIS
1992
■ Genre standards are established with Westwood's licensed game, paving the way for the developer's popularisation of RTS.

THE SETTLERS
1993
■ While slower and more methodical compared to other genre staples, *The Settlers* was a big success for Blue Byte Software..

1994

WARCRAFT
■ Blizzard's fantasy-themed RTS series makes its debut, establishing Blizzard as a key developer in the genre for years to come.

1995

Bluffer's guide

1996 COMMAND & CONQUER: RED ALERT
■ The alternate history spin-off of *Command & Conquer* launches, achieving sufficient popularity to spawn two sequels of its own.

1997 TOTAL ANNIHILATION
■ Cavedog releases one of the deepest games in the genre, spawning a fanatical modding community which is still going today.

1998 STARCRAFT
■ Real-time strategy meets e-sports as *StarCraft* becomes a popular tournament game, generating over $5 million in prizes during its lifetime.

1999 SHOGUN: TOTAL WAR
■ The Creative Assembly starts on its path to domination, establishing the historical themes that are a hallmark of the series.

2000

2001 PIKMIN
■ Nintendo's real-time strategy series debuts on the GameCube, replacing themes of military conquest with a stranded spaceman trying to get home.

2002

2003

2004 WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR
■ Based on Games Workshop's tabletop tactics game, *Dawn Of War* brilliantly translates the feel of the franchise to real-time strategy.

2005

2006 COMPANY OF HEROES
■ Relic Entertainment's World War Two strategy outing launches to massive critical acclaim, becoming the best-reviewed RTS of the decade.

2007

2008 SINS OF A SOLAR EMPIRE
■ Stardock's space-themed release allows players to go beyond the battlefield, expanding their intergalactic empires as they see fit.

2009 HALO WARS
■ Based on the first-person shooter series, this Xbox 360 real-time strategy release provided evidence of the genre's viability on consoles.



WHAT MAKES A GREAT REAL-TIME STRATEGY GAME

Discover the elements that make up all essential real-time strategy games



Chris Taylor, the designer of *Total Annihilation* and head of developer Wargaming Seattle, remembers the impact both games had as his introduction to the genre: "*Herzog Zwei* was the first RTS I played, but on the PC, it was *Dune II*, and I feel both of these get credit for the creation of the genre. *Dune II* in particular was a crystallising moment for me, because after playing for an hour it was obvious there was tremendous potential and it was the beginning of something incredible."

Dune II arrived in 1992 and served as the blueprint for RTS games to come. Many of the genre's standard features were brought together – base-building, resource gathering, a tech tree and a choice of factions were all present. Further refinements arrived in the Mega Drive version, which simplified menus and added a context-sensitive cursor. The lessons learned from *Dune II* would provide Westwood with the insight it needed to refine these elements, which became the backbone of the company's original series *Command & Conquer*.

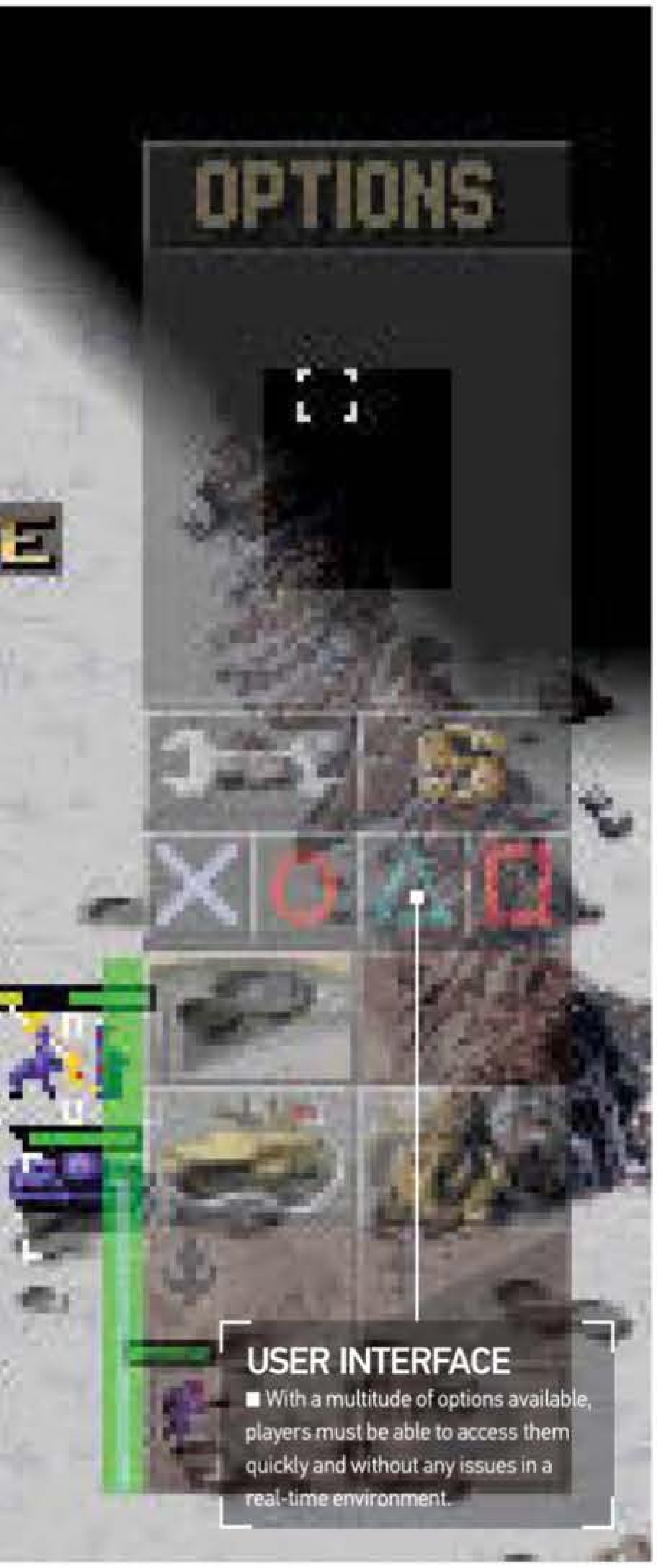
Command & Conquer married accessible and addictive play with the compelling theme of modern warfare to produce a smash hit, selling over 3 million copies. Nick recalls the



» [Mega Drive] *Powermonger* was an early pioneer in 3D rendering of in-game maps.



» [PC] *Rome: Total War* allowed players to expand the Roman empire across a vast world map.



USER INTERFACE
■ With a multitude of options available, players must be able to access them quickly and without any issues in a real-time environment.



» [N64] Interfaces are a common problem for console games in the genre – *StarCraft 64* showing the extensive reworking required.



» [GameCube] While most real-time strategy games focus on warfare, Nintendo's *Pikmin* represents a rather different approach.

impact it had: "We had just started Shiny Entertainment and were about to make *Earthworm Jim* when a friend from Westwood Studios came by the office with an advance copy of *Command & Conquer*. Office production pretty much shut down that week as we all lost focus and got lost in that game."

This success paved the way for a real-time strategy boom – a boom which was largely concentrated on the PC due to the suitability of its control schemes. Major advances in the genre have come from that platform ever since, though consoles continue to receive ports of some major releases. The number of games being released in the genre increased markedly, as Chris recalls: "I believe someone from *PC Gamer* told me, 'There are 100 RTS games in development', and I was like, 'Shit!'"

To make his own work stand out from the crowd, Chris had a number of advances in mind for the genre: "I wanted terrain to play a role, and not just be a background bitmap. I also wanted to bring air and sea into the equation in a bigger way, along with long-range artillery and nukes with a sort of race to nuclear supremacy. Many of those things are now commonplace, but back then these were all super crazy ideas." The result was *Total Annihilation*, an ambitious release which introduced 3D-rendered terrain and boasted literally hundreds of unit types. The game was also a pioneer of online content updates, with new units and maps released for free.



"The idea came out of some brainstorming we were doing, and how we'd get bored of playing with the same units day after day. And because I had originally designed the engine to be completely data-driven, the ability to ▶

"I wanted terrain to play a role, and not just be a background bitmap"
Chris Taylor

WE SPEAK TO… Al Bickham, The Creative Assembly



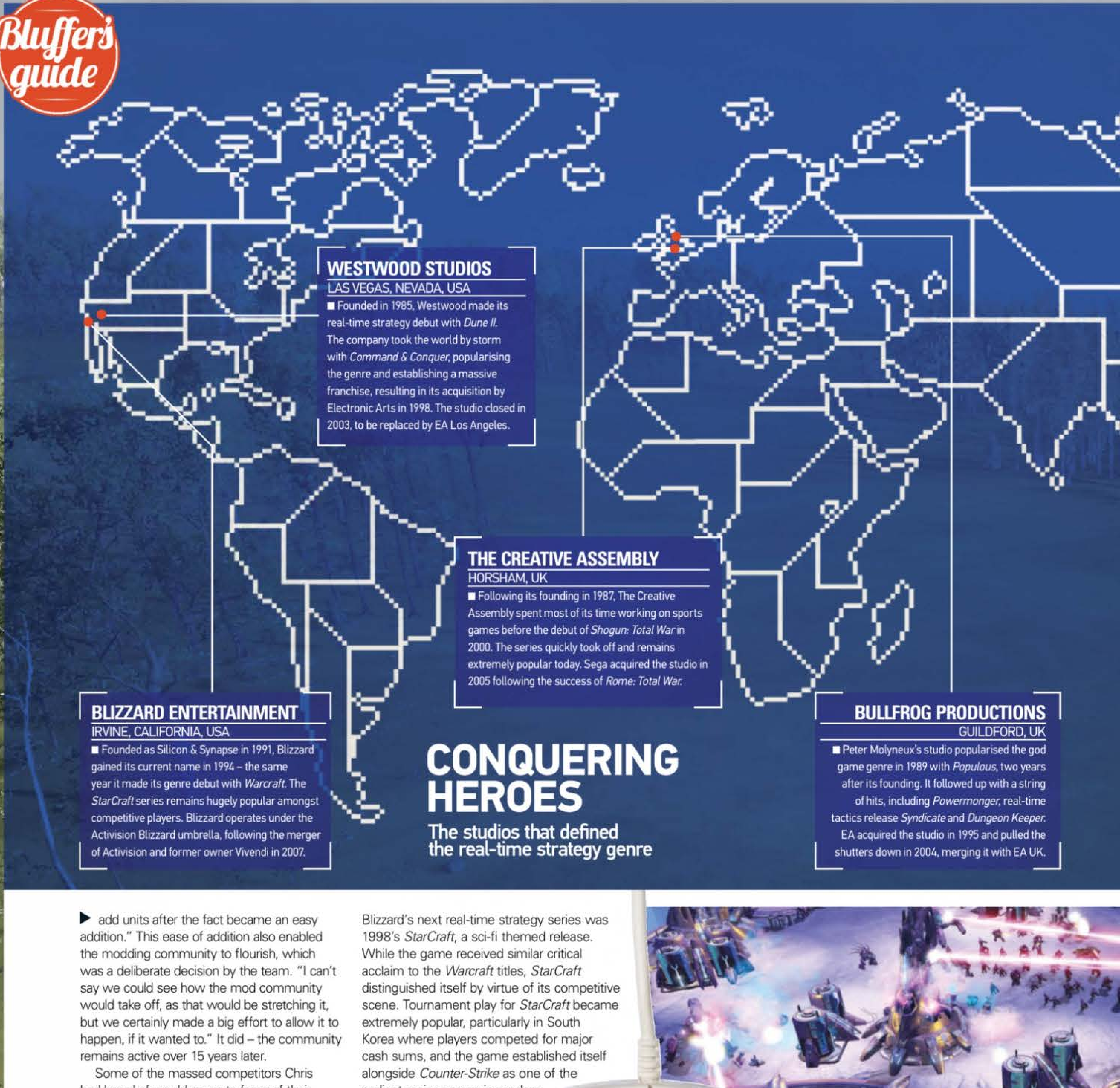
What do you feel are the essential elements of a successful real-time strategy game?
In broad terms, all great RTS games post a tactical challenge, and offer the player a rich choice of assets with which to tackle it. This variety is key to challenge and reward. We want to constantly drive the player to assess any given combat situation and apply those assets to individual battlefield scenarios where they'll play to their strengths. On a simple level, this can mean ensuring that your scissors are cutting the other guy's paper; flank charging poorly-armoured archers with your cavalry, for example. Now factor in terrain, line-of-sight-blocking topography, defensive structures, weapons of multiple ranges and effects, stealth units, cheap massed troops, limited elite troops and all the other nuanced elements of a battle, and you give the player a rich array of features to challenge and exploit. Finally, your game has to be true to its setting. Authenticity to the world in which your game takes place can round the experience into a compelling and believable tableau – whether that game has you commanding thousands of Roman legionaries, a World War Two tank platoon, or fleets of starships.

What have been the key advances in the genre since rising to prominence in the mid-Nineties?
RTS has evolved in directions that were frankly inconceivable 20 years ago. Take the explosion of MMORTS games on mobile platforms for instance; the seeds of games such as *Dune II* and *Shogun: Total War* can still be seen reflected in those. For us and the *Total War* series, technology has definitely helped play a part. The advent of rapidly-improving hardware has enabled us to create some of the most epic, cinematic scenes you'll see in a game.

Real-time strategy games can easily become very complex. What steps need to be taken to maintain a low barrier to entry?
Leading new players in gently by introducing gameplay systems in series is an important approach for us. *Rome II: Total War* offers a self-contained, prologue-style mini-campaign for instance, which introduces players to the core principles and systems of the game. Also, certain levels of standardisation can help. Employing a familiar user-input system is a good example; if you can drag a box and move icons on your PC desktop, you're demonstrating the core control skills required to play an RTS. Of course a visually intuitive UI helps as well. We've certainly learned a lot from playing a wide range of games which denote rank increases, morale debuffs and so forth in a visual fashion, in contrast to attention-sapping strings of text.

What do you feel the *Total War* series has brought to the genre as a whole?
Historical authenticity, depth and unprecedented scale. *Total War* is also unique in the way it combines a turn-based game of statecraft, expansion and empire management with colossal real-time battles.

People often ask us when we're going to run out of periods to cover and the answer is… probably never. History offers a near-endless mine of fascinating cultures, conflicts, leaders, heroes and unique challenges to explore and surprise our players with.



WESTWOOD STUDIOS
LAS VEGAS, NEVADA, USA

■ Founded in 1985, Westwood made its real-time strategy debut with *Dune II*. The company took the world by storm with *Command & Conquer*, popularising the genre and establishing a massive franchise, resulting in its acquisition by Electronic Arts in 1998. The studio closed in 2003, to be replaced by EA Los Angeles.

THE CREATIVE ASSEMBLY
HORSHAM, UK

■ Following its founding in 1987, The Creative Assembly spent most of its time working on sports games before the debut of *Shogun: Total War* in 2000. The series quickly took off and remains extremely popular today. Sega acquired the studio in 2005 following the success of *Rome: Total War*.

BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT
IRVINE, CALIFORNIA, USA

■ Founded as Silicon & Synapse in 1991, Blizzard gained its current name in 1994 – the same year it made its genre debut with *Warcraft*. The *StarCraft* series remains hugely popular amongst competitive players. Blizzard operates under the Activision Blizzard umbrella, following the merger of Activision and former owner Vivendi in 2007.

CONQUERING HEROES

The studios that defined the real-time strategy genre

BULLFROG PRODUCTIONS
GUILDFORD, UK

■ Peter Molyneux's studio popularised the god game genre in 1989 with *Populous*, two years after its founding. It followed up with a string of hits, including *Powermonger*, real-time tactics release *Syndicate* and *Dungeon Keeper*. EA acquired the studio in 1995 and pulled the shutters down in 2004, merging it with EA UK.

▶ add units after the fact became an easy addition." This ease of addition also enabled the modding community to flourish, which was a deliberate decision by the team. "I can't say we could see how the mod community would take off, as that would be stretching it, but we certainly made a big effort to allow it to happen, if it wanted to." It did – the community remains active over 15 years later.

Some of the massed competitors Chris had heard of would go on to fame of their own in the late Nineties. Blue Byte Software's *The Settlers* was slower-paced compared to many of its peers, with its most recent release being in 2012, while *Dungeon Keeper* was another gem from Bullfrog. Microsoft's *Age Of Empires* series also started here, taking the long-term history approach of *Civilization* and putting it into a turn-based framework. But the next big leap forward would come from a developer which was becoming increasingly proficient within the genre: Blizzard.

After experiencing success with its *Warcraft* series, first launched in 1994, Blizzard's next real-time strategy series was 1998's *StarCraft*, a sci-fi themed release. While the game received similar critical acclaim to the *Warcraft* titles, *StarCraft* distinguished itself by virtue of its competitive scene. Tournament play for *StarCraft* became extremely popular, particularly in South Korea where players competed for major cash sums, and the game established itself alongside *Counter-Strike* as one of the earliest major games in modern e-sports. The game enjoyed equal footing with regular sports – it was televised for over a decade, with top players receiving fame and sponsorship as well as prizes. The status of *StarCraft* in South Korea is such that when 11 players were found guilty of match fixing in 2010, they received community service orders, fines and even suspended prison sentences.







TECHNOSOFT
NAGASAKI, JAPAN
■ Founded in 1980, Technosoft is most famous for its *Thunder Force* shoot-'em-up series. The company's only real-time strategy game was *Herzog Zwei*, which is a hugely impressive legacy to leave. The company was merged into the research and development division of pachinko manufacturer Twenty-One Company following its acquisition in 2001.



» [Xbox 360] *Halo Wars* is a leading light of console strategy games, combining a popular franchise with bespoke design for its format.



» [PC] *Supreme Commander*, Chris Taylor's spiritual successor to *Total Annihilation*, was afforded a greater sense of scale by improved hardware.

DID YOU KNOW?

1 The first strategy videogame to include real-time elements was *Utopia*, a precursor to the god game genre that launched on the Intellivision in 1981.

2 *Dune II* owes its existence to the slow progress of the original *Dune*, which was headed for cancellation when Virgin Interactive got in touch with Westwood Studios.

3 The real-time strategy boom that followed the success of *Command & Conquer* saw the genre reach saturation point quickly, with up to 100 titles in development at its peak.

4 The professional *StarCraft* scene was rocked by a scandal in 2010, in which 11 South Korean players were found guilty of match fixing and received major legal punishments.

5 *Warcraft III*'s user-created map Defense Of The Ancients became so popular that an entire genre was spun off from it, in the form of popular MOBA titles.

"We couldn't see how the mod community would take off, but we made a big effort to allow it to happen"
Chris Taylor

Warcraft III: Reign Of Chaos marked a key turning point for the genre in 2002. While the game itself didn't bring any great changes, it received unanimous praise from the press and importantly gained a large modding community. Community-created maps for the game achieved major success of their own – most notably *Defence Of The Ancients*, a map centred around use of the game's Hero units which dropped traditional real-time strategy elements such as resource collection and base building. *Defence Of The Ancients* inspired imitators such as the incredibly popular *League Of Legends* as well as its own standalone sequel, establishing the multiplayer online battle arena subgenre in its own right.

The last decade has seen new recruits joining the grizzled veterans of the genre. The *Total War* real-time tactics series hit the mainstream with *Rome: Total War* in 2004, prompting the acquisition of developer The Creative Assembly by Sega and starting the series on the path to its current status as one of the most popular series in the genre. *Company Of Heroes* became an instant classic upon release in 2006, receiving reviews that place it at the head of the genre, and in 2007 *Supreme Commander*, Chris's spiritual successor to *Total Annihilation*, arrived to excellent reviews.

Real-time strategy genre is still a relatively young genre and with the increased prominence of PC gaming in recent years, Chris feels that a reinvigorated audience promises a bright future. "I think we're seeing a resurgence in hardcore PC gaming, and for years that was a kind of dirty word… but that's changing. Players want deep and engaging games with lots of depth, and not simplified games that are dumbed-down for the masses. Beyond that, the sky is the limit, and I think everyone is ready for something new." *



» [PC] Real-time strategy games set in space, such as *Sins Of A Solar Empire*, tend to make full use of 3D battle engines



» [PC] While real conflicts are often portrayed, the likes of *Company Of Heroes* stick to historical events like World War Two.



TOP 25 GAME BOY GAMES

Your votes have been counted and the standings are final – these are the very best games for Nintendo's monochrome masterpiece, as chosen by Retro Gamer readers

MEGA MAN II

DEVELOPER: BIOX

YEAR: 1991 **GENRE:** SPORTS

25 **In a surprising** opening to our list, series creator Keiji Inafune's least favourite of the Game Boy *Mega Man* games proves to be your favourite. The regular handheld developer for the series took a back seat for this release, resulting in a game which felt different from the rest of the Game Boy titles. The game combines elements of the second and third NES *Mega Man* games, but thankfully for new players the difficulty was lowered.



MYSTIC QUEST

DEVELOPER: SQUARE

YEAR: 1991 **GENRE:** ACTION-RPG

24 **While it was** known as *Final Fantasy Adventure* outside of Europe, *Mystic Quest* is only loosely based on Square's classic series, ditching many of the *Final Fantasy* traditions such as multi-character parties and turn-based combat. Instead, *Mystic Quest* is a great little action-RPG in which your goal is to stop the Mana Tree from falling under the control of the Dark Lord of Glaive. Today the game is best known for being the precursor to the SNES classic *Secret Of Mana*, which led to a Game Boy Advance remake titled *Sword Of Mana* in 2003.



PROBOTECTOR

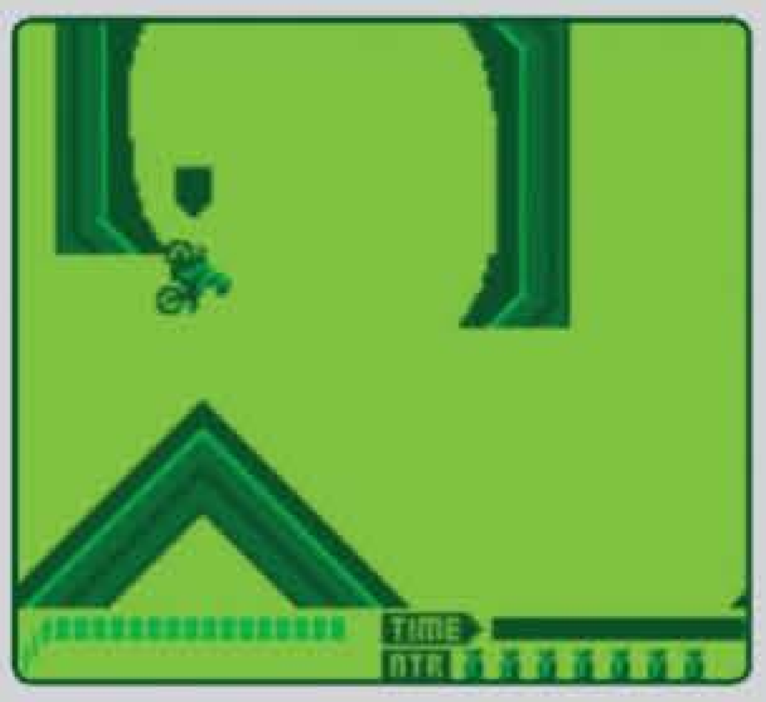
DEVELOPER: KONAMI

YEAR: 1991 **GENRE:** RUN-AND-GUN

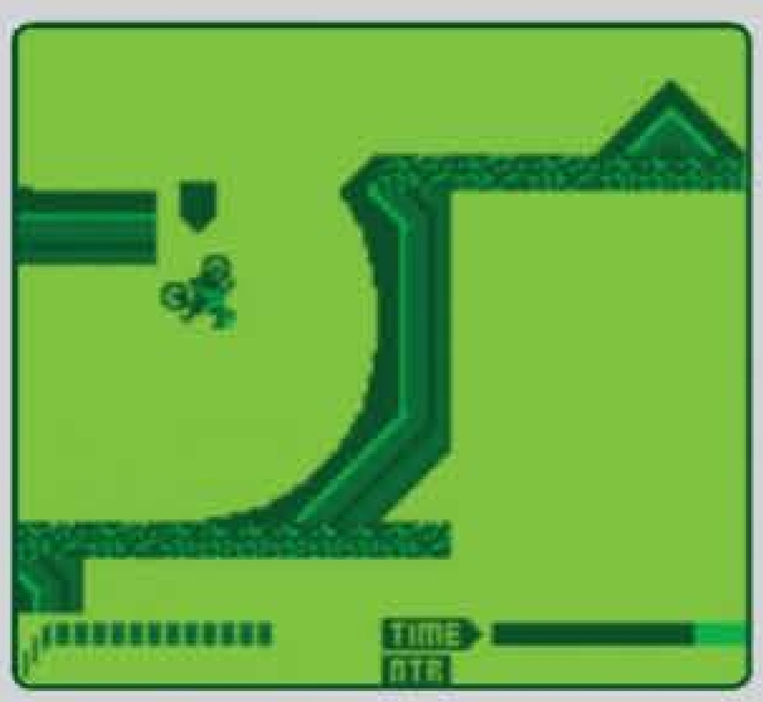
23 **Known as *Operation C*** in North America, *Probotector* fans can't have been disappointed by this fantastic portable outing, which retains the frantic action of the series' arcade and console outings. Alternating between side-scrolling and top-down sections as in *Super Contra*, the blasting is hugely enjoyable in both views. Unsurprisingly, given the game's heritage, it's also a real challenge. One of the Game Boy's best available blasters.











MOTOCROSS MANIACS

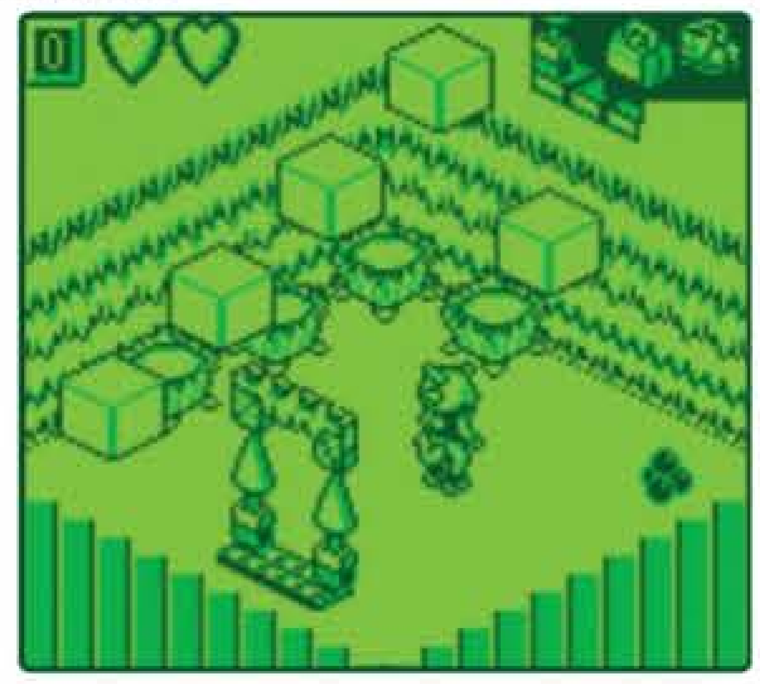
■ **DEVELOPER:** KONAMI
■ **YEAR:** 1989 ■ **GENRE:** RACING/PLATFORMER

22 ***Motocross Maniacs* might** not have the best visuals on the system, but it's a blast to play. Combining the motocross gameplay of titles such as *Kikstart* with platform stages, *Motocross Maniacs* presents players with a variety of hills, loops and ramps, requiring excellent balancing and judicious use of nitro to conquer, as well as collection of the T tokens that refill your time bar. Once you've managed to clear stages, beating your best times is the challenge. It's a simple formula, but the fantastic stage design makes it a joy to replay.

As an interesting aside, *Motocross Maniacs* eventually resurfaced on the compilation cartridge *Konami GB Collection Vol 3*, under the new name *Bikers*. It's easy to miss due to this bizarre decision, so if you're looking for a copy you'd do well to keep an eye out for this release too – it's got the Game Boy Color branding, but will still work on monochrome systems.

MONSTER MAX

■ **DEVELOPER:** RARE
■ **YEAR:** 1994 ■ **GENRE:** ISOMETRIC ADVENTURE



21 It doesn't enjoy the popularity of *Head Over Heels*, but Jon Ritman's isometric Game Boy adventure is one of your favourite games on the system regardless. *Monster Max* sees the titular protagonist seeking to stop the villainous Krond from banning all music. Taking cues from the 8-bit classic, the game sees Max venturing through a mammoth 29 stages, each filled with platforming and puzzle elements as well as a variety enemies to avoid.

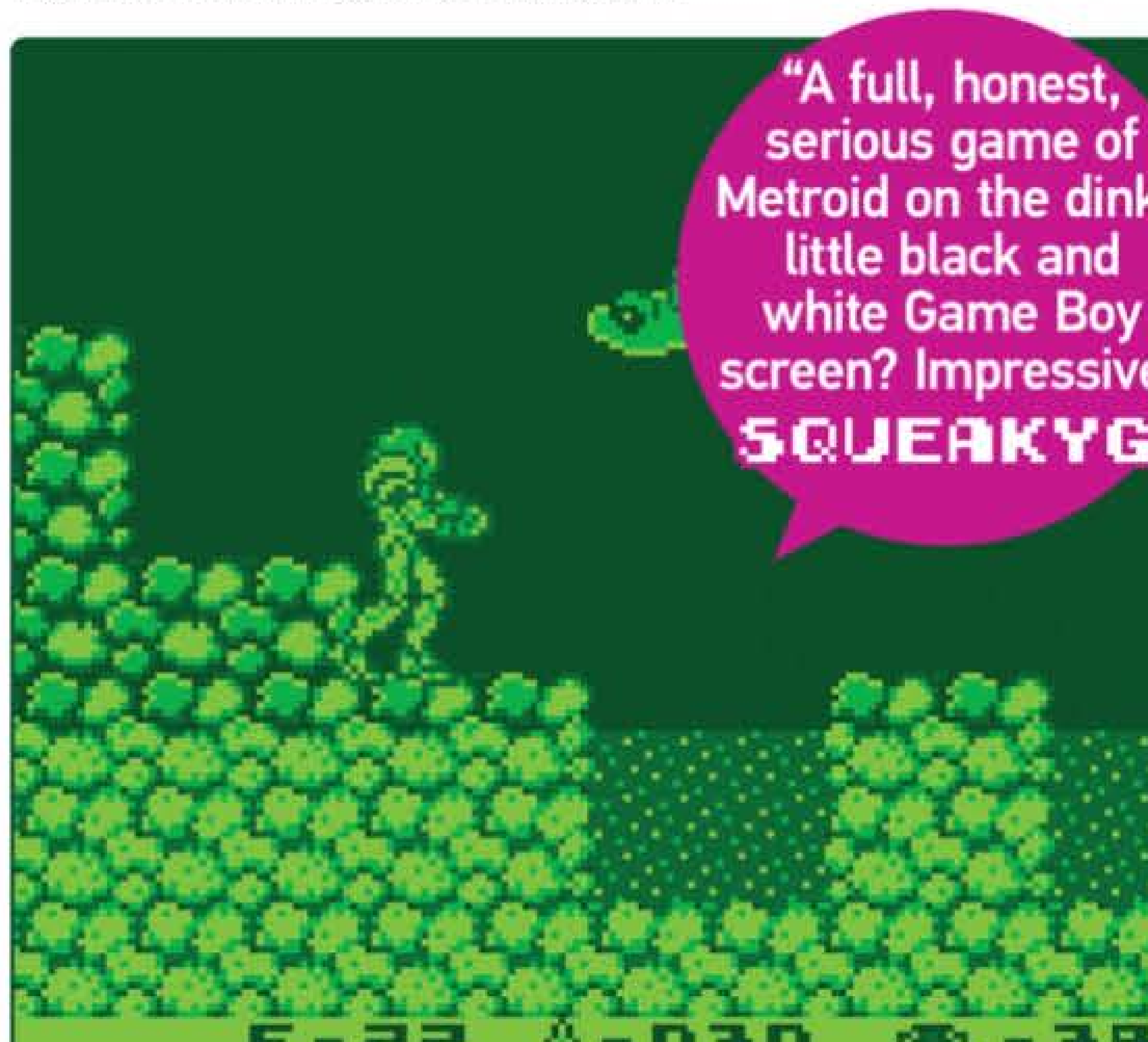
Monster Max received excellent reviews, but publishing problems caused the game to be delayed for a long time, allowing excitement to dissipate. Its release during the system's mid-Nineties slump also hurt, causing sales to fall below expectations and leaving the game as an oft-forgotten classic. We can't help but feel it would have done better in the voting if it had been released during one of the system's boom periods.

METROID II: RETURN OF SAMUS

■ **DEVELOPER:** NINTENDO
■ **YEAR:** 1994 ■ **GENRE:** ACTION-ADVENTURE

20 While *Metroid II* had divided fans over the years, Samus Aran's second adventure garnered enough love from the voters to appear in your top 25. The game takes the traditional *Metroid* approach to game design, with a very large stage in place of multiple smaller ones. Your goal is to locate and destroy *Metroid* creatures, with a detector tracking the number remaining in the bottom-right of the screen. Unlike in other *Metroid* releases, destroying Metroids progressively opens up new sections, allowing for further exploration.

While the game doesn't utilise *Metroid*'s usual trick of providing natural barriers to progress by utilising a series of progressive upgrades, which puts some fans off, the game actually features a number of improvements over the NES original that would become standard. Samus is now able to crouch and fire, and power-ups such as the spider ball would later return in the *Metroid Prime* series. *Metroid II* boasts some large, detailed sprites too – Samus is absolutely huge! However, while some appreciate the design, others find it makes the game feel rather too cramped. There's still a lot to like about *Metroid II*, so revisit it some time.



"A full, honest, serious game of Metroid on the dinky little black and white Game Boy screen? Impressive"
SQUEAKYG

DUCKTALES

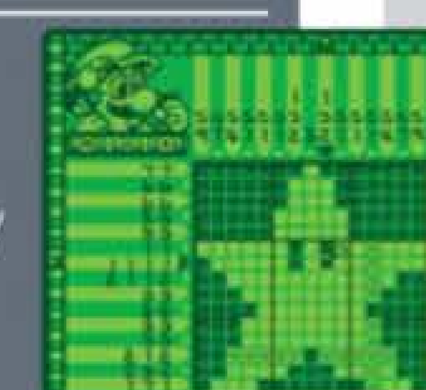
■ **DEVELOPER:** CAPCOM
■ **YEAR:** 1990 ■ **GENRE:** PLATFORMER



19 Scrooge McDuck's star turn remains one of the better licensed platformers out there, thanks to Capcom's wise decision to redesign the stages of the NES game to fit the Game Boy's smaller screen.

MARIO'S PICROSS

■ **DEVELOPER:** JUPITER
■ **YEAR:** 1990 ■ **GENRE:** PUZZLE



18 Cross-referencing the number of marks in a line to make a picture is the goal of this tricky puzzler. The 30-minute timer doesn't appear threatening at first, but quickly becomes a worry as mistakes chip away the minutes.

KIRBY'S DREAM LAND

■ **DEVELOPER:** HAL LABORATORY
■ **YEAR:** 1992 ■ **GENRE:** PLATFORMER



17 Kirby's debut might have been a little on the easy side, but the polished platforming and impressive visuals mean that it's fondly remembered by the **Retro Gamer** readership, getting the nod over its 1995 sequel.

GOLF

■ **DEVELOPER:** NINTENDO
■ **YEAR:** 1989 ■ **GENRE:** SPORTS



16 *Golf* doesn't try to do anything particularly fancy, sticking to a top-down view of two 18-hole courses. The game is comprehensive all the same, featuring hazards, a range of clubs and a putting green with slope physics.

KIRBY'S PINBALL LAND

■ **DEVELOPER:** HAL LABORATORY
■ **YEAR:** 1993 ■ **GENRE:** PINBALL



15 Are RG readers really into pinball, or was HAL Laboratory just really good at making pinball games? *Kirby's Pinball Land* includes three tables, expanding on the template set by *Revenge Of The 'Gator*.



BATMAN

DEVELOPER: SUNSOFT
YEAR: 1990 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

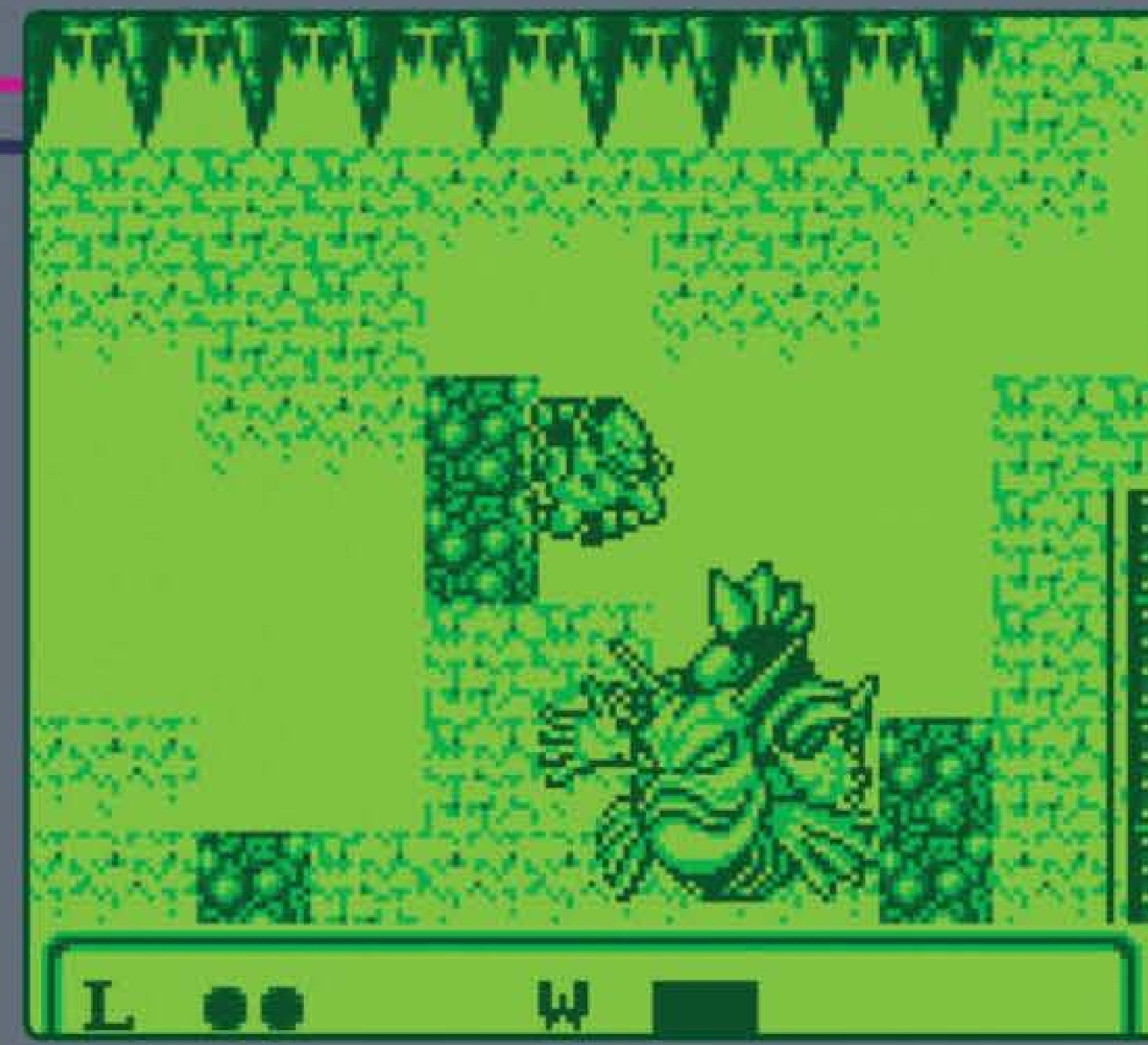
14 **Sunsoft's Batman sprite** might be the most minimalist representation of the character yet seen, but the game was packed with playability. Released in the wake of the blockbuster film starring Michael Keaton, this platformer is your favourite movie licence on the Game Boy.

The action sees the caped crusader traversing stages while shooting enemies with a variety of weapons, including batarangs, before going one-on-one with a boss at the end of the stage. As is often the case with great licensed games, *Batman* injects some variety by switching genres, with shoot-'em-up action also included. There's nothing hugely innovative about *Batman*, but it's a game which succeeds as a representation of its source material and a very solid, well-designed platform game.





"Simply amazingly playable! And that music!"
DUMPSTER



GARGOYLE'S QUEST

DEVELOPER: CAPCOM
YEAR: 1990 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

13 **As a spin-off** of the *Ghosts 'N Goblins* series, *Gargoyle's Quest* sees you taking on the role of one of the game's most irritating enemies. You play as Firebrand, a gargoyle who is fated to defeat the evil king of the land to restore peace – a goal you faintly wish he could have kept for the main series.

The platforming action in *Gargoyle's Quest* is very polished, with interesting stage design that takes full advantage of the gargoyle's natural affinity for walls. Firebrand can stick to them, allowing him to climb up passages and avoid hazards. He's also got the ability to fly for limited periods, easing tricky jumps. Those abilities are thoroughly necessary though, as the difficulty of the main series returns in full effect. *Gargoyle's Quest* is definitely a challenge, but it remains a thoroughly enjoyable one.

REVENGE OF THE 'GATOR

DEVELOPER: HAL LABORATORY
YEAR: 1989 **GENRE:** PINBALL

12 **HAL Laboratory's first** Game Boy pinball game stirs fond memories for **Retro Gamer** readers, beating the developer's later release *Kirby's Pinball Land* in the voting. It's not hard to see why you love it – it isn't just a great Game Boy game, but a fantastic pinball game which stands tall amongst home console contemporaries such as *Alien Crush*.

Wisely adopting a flick-screen format to avoid the blurring that could cause problems in Game Boy titles, the game features just a single table split across four screens. It's excellently designed though – like the other great videogame pinball tables, it takes advantage of the format by including features that are impractical and impossible on a real table, including the three bonus stages that take place on extra screens. Charming visuals round off the package, with the dancing 'gators giving the game a memorable identity.



"Mole Mania's friendly exterior conceals a devilish nature, as its difficulty quickly escalates"

SUPER RC PRO-AM

DEVELOPER: RARE
YEAR: 1991 **GENRE:** RACING

11 ***Super RC Pro-Am*** would be great fun on any system, but luckily enough the isometric perspective is perfectly suited to the Game Boy. While it was already present in the enjoyable NES original, this viewpoint goes a long way toward mitigating the problems that the Game Boy's blur-prone screen can cause for racing releases in general. This suitability for the hardware allowed the game to surpass classic multiplayer racers such as *Micro Machines* in the voting, as they simply weren't adapted to the hardware as well.

Super RC Pro-Am brings the fun of radio-controlled racing to the Game Boy. Each track sees you taking on three CPU opponents, with victory determined as much by your ability to manage the hazards of the track as by your cornering skill, thanks to the oil patches, speed-up pads and weaponry strewn across the game's 24 courses. One of the game's most notable features is its multiplayer. Not only does it support two-player via the link cable, it also supports the Four Player Adapter, a perfect addition.







MOLE MANIA

■ **DEVELOPER:** PAX SOFTNICA
■ **YEAR:** 1996 ■ **GENRE:** PUZZLE

10

Having arrived during the mid-Nineties, a relatively quiet period for the Game Boy, *Mole Mania* had the potential to become one of the Game Boy's forgotten classics. Indeed, it's one of the most frequently overlooked games to have benefited from the involvement of Shigeru Miyamoto. Thankfully our readers tend to stick by their systems, resulting in *Mole Mania*'s appearance in the top ten – an accolade it thoroughly deserves.

Your hero is Muddy, a mole who is trying to rescue his wife and children, who have been kidnapped by the local farmer. For the player, this means making your way through a series of top-down puzzle stages, eating cabbage to keep your strength up while avoiding enemies. If your route is blocked on the surface, Muddy can dig underground to open up whole new routes. But digging can cause problems, as certain surface obstacles can't pass the holes created in the process. At the end of each stage, Muddy faces off against a boss in order to rescue a relative.

The game's friendly exterior conceals a devilish nature, as its difficulty quickly escalates. Thankfully, the design makes it rather hard to put down. The wide variety of obstacles keeps the game interesting, and the game caters to completists by scoring the performance on each stage out of 100. The game even features multiplayer for those of you lucky enough to have a friend that also owns the game. This mode allows the second player to take control of the farmer, attempting to whack Muddy as he attempts to steal cabbage.

While it's now available via the 3DS Virtual Console service for all of you that missed it the first time around, given that both the 3DS and Wii U have two screens, we'd love to see *Mole Mania* revived for modern systems with Muddy digging between screens. How about it, Nintendo?

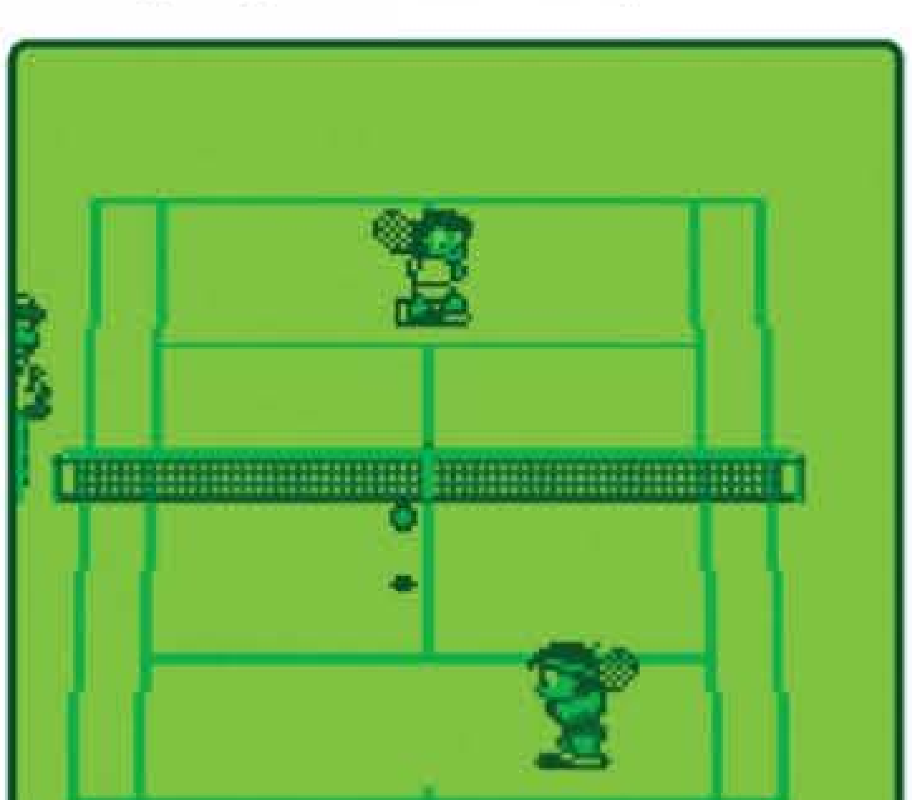


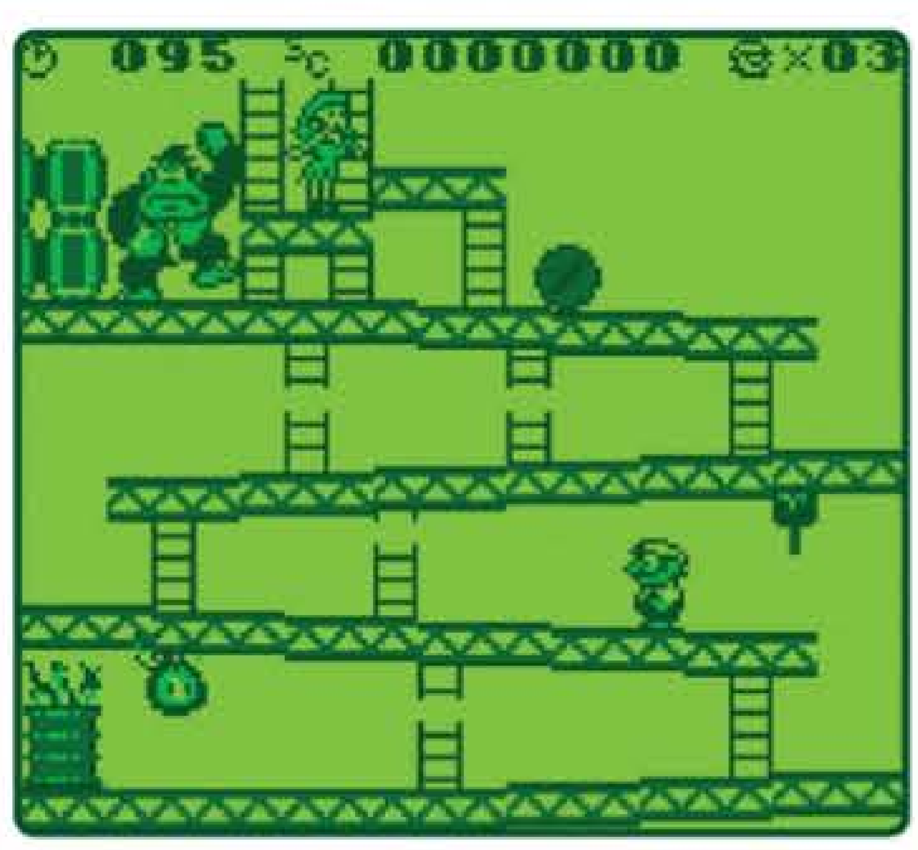
TENNIS

■ **DEVELOPER:** NINTENDO
■ **YEAR:** 1989 ■ **GENRE:** SPORTS

9

As one of the Game Boy's earliest releases, *Tennis* reached a wide range of players over the years, helping it to ride high in the voting. It's a simple but playable game of tennis, featuring a good implementation of the rules and a full range of shots. While the game doesn't include much in the way of structure, with even a basic tournament mode omitted, the challenging CPU opponents help to pass the time on long journeys and the link cable multiplayer added some welcome longevity. The inclusion of Mario as umpire added some personality to proceedings, greatly boosting the game's memorability.





DONKEY KONG

■ **DEVELOPER:** NINTENDO
■ **YEAR:** 1994 ■ **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

8

This impressive re-imagining of *Donkey Kong* starts off simple, with the first four stages taken from the arcade game, leading many to believe it's nothing more than an impressive port of the original arcade game. Nintendo plays a trump card however when the single-screen stages give way as the game turns into a completely different beast. Dozens of puzzle platforming stages await Mario, who needs to find keys to exit each stage. The game also features some great boss encounters with Donkey Kong himself, often returning to the style of the original game. It's also fully compatible with the Super Game Boy.

DOUBLE DRAGON

■ **DEVELOPER:** TECHNOS
■ **YEAR:** 1990 ■ **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP

7

As a technically limited machine with a monochrome display, the Game Boy never had an easy time of arcade conversions. With *Double Dragon*, Technos went for the most sensible approach – tailoring the game to the hardware, rather than pushing the hardware to accommodate the game. Built from the ground up for the Game Boy, *Double Dragon* captured the spirit of the arcade game excellently, creating a fun little brawler in the process.

Stages, enemies and weaponry are all instantly recognisable from the original, but have been retooled for the small screen, something that works extremely well. The first stage of the Game Boy game takes elements from the first two stages of the arcade game, and begins to deviate more heavily from the second stage onwards as platforming elements are introduced. Only the inclusion of link cable co-op could have seen this excellent conversion climb higher.



"I'm still playing it some 24 years later. Love it!"
COMBO BREAKER







WARIO LAND: SUPER MARIO LAND 3

■ **DEVELOPER:** NINTENDO

■ **YEAR:** 1993 ■ **GENRE:** PLATFORMER



5 **Wario's own platformer** pipped his villainous debut to make your top five. More than a mere spin-off, Nintendo showed its confidence in the quality of *Wario Land* by giving it the *Super Mario Land 3* title. Reflecting his origins as the bad guy, Wario is out to collect as much cash as possible to buy a castle. The contrast is plain to see in play, too – Mario lightly hops on the heads of his enemies, whereas Wario rams into them with a shoulder barge. Overall, an excellent platform adventure that turned a one-shot villain into a star.

SUPER MARIO LAND 2: 6 GOLDEN COINS

■ **DEVELOPER:** NINTENDO

■ **YEAR:** 1993 ■ **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

6 ***Super Mario Land*** *2* was an impressive technical showcase, highlighting how far Game Boy development had come since 1989. Where the original game featured very basic visuals, a massively increased cartridge capacity allowed *Super Mario Land 2* to feature much more detailed visuals. And while *Super Mario Land* had a linear progression, the sequel allowed players to tackle its six worlds in any order before taking on the game's villain, the debuting Wario.

While it places highly, *Super Mario Land 2* failed to best its predecessor in the voting. Players were divided by the differences, with some favouring the improved visuals of the second game and others preferring the more challenging gameplay of the first.

POKÉMON RED AND BLUE



■ **DEVELOPER:** GAME FREAK

■ **YEAR:** 1996 ■ **GENRE:** RPG

4 ***Pokémon*****'s design legacy** stretches back to the early life of the Game Boy, with Satoshi Tajiri's first concept documents dating back to 1990, but it didn't arrive until 1996 – and gamers outside of Japan had to wait even longer. But the timing worked out for Nintendo. While the meat of the game was of a high quality, players worldwide dusted off their hardware for the multiplayer features. With each version boasting exclusive monsters, the full collection of 151 Pokémon can only be obtained by trading with other players, making *Pokémon* the best reason to own a link cable.

SUPER MARIO LAND

■ **DEVELOPER:** NINTENDO

■ **YEAR:** 1989 ■ **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

3 **It might be** visually simple, but you chose the original *Super Mario Land* over the sequel – and it wasn't close. Mario's Game Boy debut contains the classic gameplay we've come to expect from the plumber's platform outings, but as the only entry in the *Mario* series directed by Satoru Okada, the game has some distinctive features that set it apart from other *Mario* games. Fireballs can be used to collect coins that lie out of Mario's reach, a fact taken into account by level designers, while distinctive enemies such as sphinxes and robots help the game to stick in the memory.



"Has there ever been a game that demonstrated so starkly that pretty graphics are always secondary to playability?"
MR PICKLE

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: LINK'S AWAKENING

■ **DEVELOPER:** NINTENDO

■ **YEAR:** 1993 ■ **GENRE:** ACTION-RPG

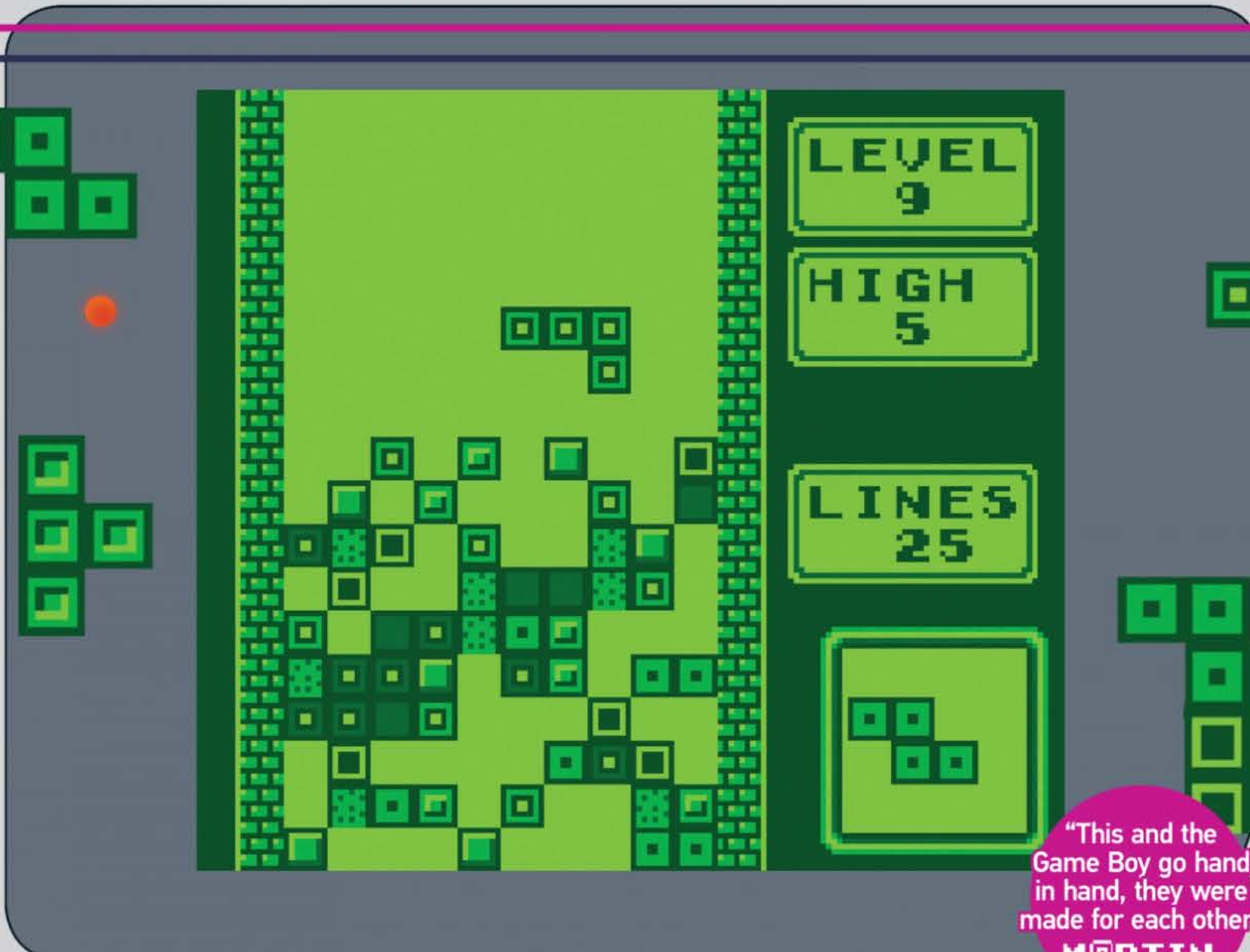
2 **Far ahead of** the rest of the field and running the winner close, *Link's Awakening* reaches second place. It's not hard to see why – the game is absolutely fantastic, successfully capturing the sense of adventure that we expect from the series. The large world and top-down monster slashing, the solid foundations on which 2D *Zelda* games are built, are both intact. However, it is the strength of storytelling that resonated with players, leaving a long-lasting impression.

Much like *Mystic Quest* earlier in this list, *Link's Awakening* plays around with series conventions by removing Link from his normal Hyrule surroundings. There's no Triforce and even the titular princess is missing, as this classic adventure puts the hero on Koholint Island, where he seeks to wake the Wind Fish. While the characters you'll encounter are often funny, the tale eventually ends on a memorable, bittersweet note.









"This and the Game Boy go hand in hand, they were made for each other"
M@RTIN

TETRIS

■ **DEVELOPER:** BULLET-PROOF SOFTWARE ■ **YEAR:** 1989 ■ **GENRE:** PUZZLE

1

Come on now – did you really think it was going to be anything else? *Tetris* was an absolute phenomenon, selling over 30 million copies and single-handedly ensuring the Game Boy's success over its numerous handheld competitors. While the Game Boy version wasn't the original, the perfect combination of software and hardware ensures that it remains the most fondly remembered.

The genius of *Tetris* is its simplicity – the game can be explained to a newcomer in a matter of seconds. Bricks fall from the top of the screen, you use them to build a wall, and completed rows disappear. The more rows you clear at once, the higher you'll score. The challenge of the game lies in keeping a single session going for as long as possible, with the constantly increasing speed of the game ensuring that you can't last forever. But you always feel you could have done better, so you try again. And again. And a few more times. As "one more go" becomes the most-used phrase in your vocabulary, you realise that you've become addicted to the game. And that's before you even consider the equally addictive multiplayer mode.

Nintendo shrewdly made *Tetris* the official pack-in game for North America and Europe, with the universal appeal of the software driving sales of the hardware and making the game the best-selling Game Boy title in the process. Even the *Pokémon* craze a decade later couldn't topple the success of *Tetris*.

While *Tetris* is simple and the conversion process relatively uncomplicated, actually getting the rights was famously challenging. While the Cold War was nearing its end, the Soviet Union was still massively suspicious of outsiders – particularly Westerners – and the unannounced arrival of Henk Rogers was no small matter. Finding the right people was not only problematic, but caused major problems for those contacted as they came under suspicion of having contact from the West.

The eventual licensing negotiations were conducted with a constant KGB presence, but introduced Henk to *Tetris* designer Alexey Pajitnov, who would receive little financial benefit from the success of the Game Boy release as the copyright belonged to the state, preventing him from claiming any royalties. The two would eventually go into business together when Alexey regained the rights in 1996, forming The Tetris Company.

Tetris is great no matter what you play it on, but the Game Boy version has always felt like the perfect marriage of software and form factor. The game is suitable for quick sessions and is one you'll constantly want to return to, so a version that you are able to take anywhere is clearly going to be awesome – and that's why it's your favourite Game Boy game.

FIVE REASONS WHY IT'S GREAT

- The simple gameplay of *Tetris* gives it universal appeal, which is unmatched by any other game
- *Tetris* saves you money – by being ridiculously addictive, it reduces the amount of time you have for other games
- You can always carry a copy of *Tetris*, thanks to the Game Boy's portable nature
- The rocket launch that follows a high-scoring session is one of the greatest pats on the back in gaming
- The Game Boy's rendition of Russian folk song *Korobeiniki* leaves an indelible imprint on your brain



CLASSIC MOMENTS

Sega Rally Championship

» **PLATFORM:** ARCADE » **DEVELOPER:** SEGA » **RELEASED:** 1994

You'd prefer not to think about just how much money you've sunk into *Sega Rally*. It might have started out as just another fun racing game, but the challenge quickly turned into an obsession. The three main courses were conquered a while ago, but the other 14 racers proved to be an entirely more stubborn challenge and second place finishes racked up all too quickly. But countless practice runs paid off and at last, you finished the Mountain course in first place.

But the game wasn't over, as one final challenge awaited – Lakeside. Having made it to the head of the pack, your new goal was to keep that position on a brand new course. The stunning autumnal colours provided a beautiful setting for the game's most difficult course. Narrow, winding and slippery, Lakeside's roads proved a stern challenge for even the best drivers. But on that day, you weren't the best driver and you lost first place. Receiving a taste of the final stage just made you hungry for more. One more credit, then…*

BIO

When *Sega Rally Championship* reached arcades in 1994, it became the latest in a long line of Sega racing games to score both critical and commercial success. The first polygonal racer to tackle off-road driving, *Sega Rally*'s sublime handling model and tightly designed courses won it many fans. The Saturn conversion that followed in 1995 was fantastic, silencing critics of the hardware's ability to handle arcade conversions and setting the standard for racing games on the system. *Sega Rally* received a variety of arcade and console sequels, and has been noted as a key inspiration for Codemasters' *Colin McRae Rally* series.



MORE CLASSIC SEGA RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP MOMENTS

Splashdown



The courses of *Sega Rally* ranged from tarmac streets to desert roads, with each surface having its own effect on your car's handling. While each was a pleasure to drive on – particularly due to the arcade game's force feedback wheel – the most satisfying moments came from the jumps into muddy puddles on the first course. There's just something about that which appeals to our more childish instincts.

Sky High Guy



Sega Rally's desert course contains a classic arcade flourish – the helicopter flying over the track. As you near the finish line, a helicopter flies into view, kicking up dust on the track as it swoops low before flying away. Helicopter fly-pasts are a signature of Namco's *Ridge Racer* series, and the addition of extra visual effects is a piece of one-upmanship typical of Sega's arcade rivalry with Namco.

Head To Head


Sega Rally only featured two cars, but they were memorable. Did you plump for the light, boxy Lancia Delta or the sleek, heavy Toyota Celica? The limited selection of cars was perfect for the multiplayer, which unusually for the era was limited to just two players. The image of the Celica and Delta battling it out became so iconic that both cars have returned for every *Sega Rally*.

Game Over, Yeah!



Sega Rally composer Takenobu Mitsuyoshi might well be one of the happiest men on the planet – if you don't believe us, take a look at some videos of him on YouTube. Even his Game Over themes are incredibly upbeat, with *Sega Rally*'s being particularly memorable. While it usually signifies that you've lost, you'll feel like a winner regardless – you just can't feel down after hearing this jingle.



THE SCENE KINGS

What happens when you bring together the best demo scene coders, musicians and artists in Europe to create videogames? Kieren Hawken investigates and reveals the story of Thalion Software

» Thalion sent out very stylish promotional material to support its games.

Gütersloh is a town in the Northern Rhine area of Germany, a pretty unsuspecting place that most people have probably never heard of. But it does have one small claim to fame – it was the birthplace of Thalion Software, one of the true innovators of the 16-bit computer era.

Formed in 1988 by Holger Flöttmann and Udo Fischer, the idea behind Thalion was to bring together the best talents from the 16-bit demo scene to produce original games for the Atari ST, Commodore Amiga and PC compatibles. Udo was no stranger to the scene himself, as he was part of the famous ST demo group The Exceptions (also known as TEX) under the pseudonym '-ME-'. The first person he brought in to help him was fellow Exception Erik 'ES' Simon, who remembers the birth of Thalion well. "Udo Fischer was a friend of mine with whom I worked on *Dragonflight*, a large-scale RPG, before we joined Thalion as co-founders," he reveals. Erik explains that it wasn't long before many other faces started to fill the office. "Holger brought some ex-Rainbow Arts team members on board and we recruited a lot of friends from the demo scene too."

The influx of staff gave Thalion a great base to start from and, with *Dragonflight*, it already had its first game lined up for release. But it wasn't long before the first big problem of running a big software house reared its ugly head – money! Thalion just didn't have enough of it to even get its own games published and things were looking bleak. Thankfully Thalion came up with a solution pretty quickly, as Erik explains. "We had to sell the company rather quickly to Ariolasoft back then because we just ran out of money."



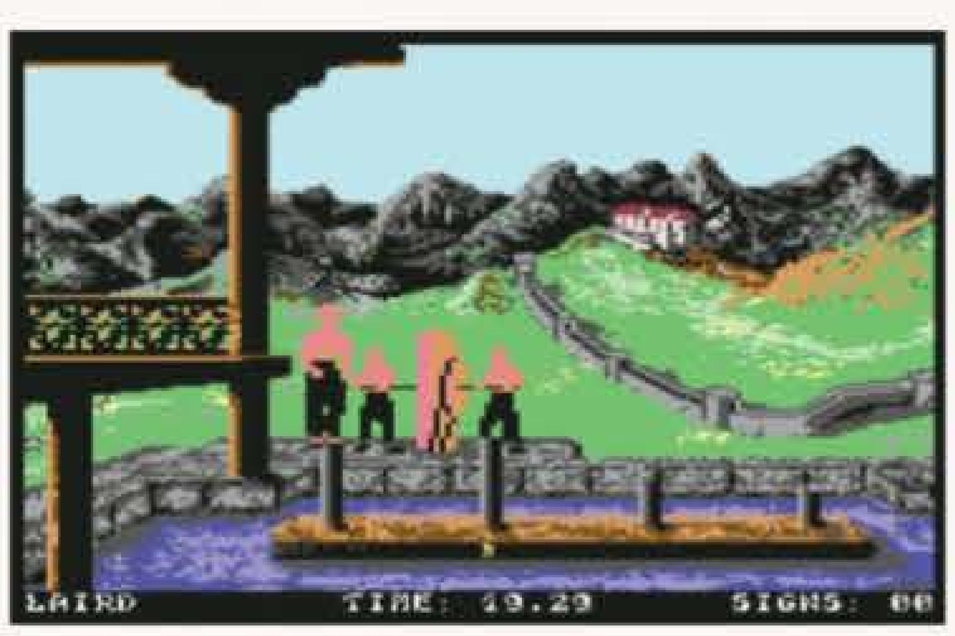
» [Atari ST] Thalion gave away huge posters with many of its games showing off their beautiful artwork.

"The company was founded by the best demo makers for the Atari ST, people who pulled off the impossible"
JURIE HORNEMAN

Ariolasoft gave Thalion a chance to get its games out there and, initially anyway, it was happy to carry on letting Thalion do its own thing with very little interference. A distribution deal with Grandslam Entertainment soon followed, which meant Thalion could get its games into the lucrative UK market and onto the shelves of major retailers.

Although ambitious RPG *Dragonflight* was scheduled to be Thalion's first game, a series of delays saw it pushed back and *Chambers Of Shaolin* took its place. *Chambers* was a one-on-one fighting game that was reminiscent of Jordan Mechner's *Karateka* in many ways. One of its key features was the way you had to train your fighter before he was let loose. It ended up being released across all three 16-bit formats as well as the Commodore 64 and received generally favourable reviews, a good start for the fledgling company. One thing that soon became prevalent in its early titles was Thalion's attention to detail, with both high quality graphics and sound leading the way. Erik talks about the ethos at Thalion during those important early years. "What made Thalion special was the unbridled passion for the games we made," he reveals. "Back then it was more of an exploration process and the percentage of things in a game that nobody has ever done before was much higher than today. We lived, breathed and dreamed games."

New concepts and genres sprung up all over the place in the 16-bit era and we started to see the same high level of creativity that we saw with the very arrival of videogames. The biggest trick that Thalion had up its sleeve when compared to its rivals was the technical proficiency of its coders. "Most of our team members had roots in the demo scene and squeezed amazing stuff out of the 16-bit systems. 50Hz full-screen scrolling on the ST and texture-mapped 3D dungeons on the ▶



» [C64] *Chambers Of Shaolin* is one of just three games that Thalion released for the Commodore 64.


» *Lionheart* was a good indication of Thalion's superb sprite design.

INSTANT EXPERT

- The company was founded in 1988 by several members of the vibrant Atari ST demo scene.
- Thalion's Tim Moss would later go on to join Sony and was the lead programmer on the award-winning *God Of War* games.
- *Lionheart*, *Atomix* and *Tangram* have all been updated for modern machines and mobile devices.
- Thalion's games were distributed in Europe by well-known UK publisher Grandslam.
- The long-lost English version of *Ambermoon* was reviewed by many magazines in 1993 but never released. It can now been downloaded from the Thalion Web Shrine.
- *Chambers Of Shaolin* and *Seven Gates Of Jambala* were released for the Amiga CD32 via Unique Software, a subsidiary of Grandslam.
- Jochen Hippel's soundtrack CD was the first ever studio-recorded album of videogame music, some five years before anyone else created one.
- A homebrew version of *Atomix* was released for the Atari Jaguar in 2006 by The Removers.
- Thalion was one of the first companies to produce an officially-licensed flight simulator. *A320 Airbus* was written with the help of Lufthansa, Jeppesen and Airbus.

DEMO DISK JOCKEYS

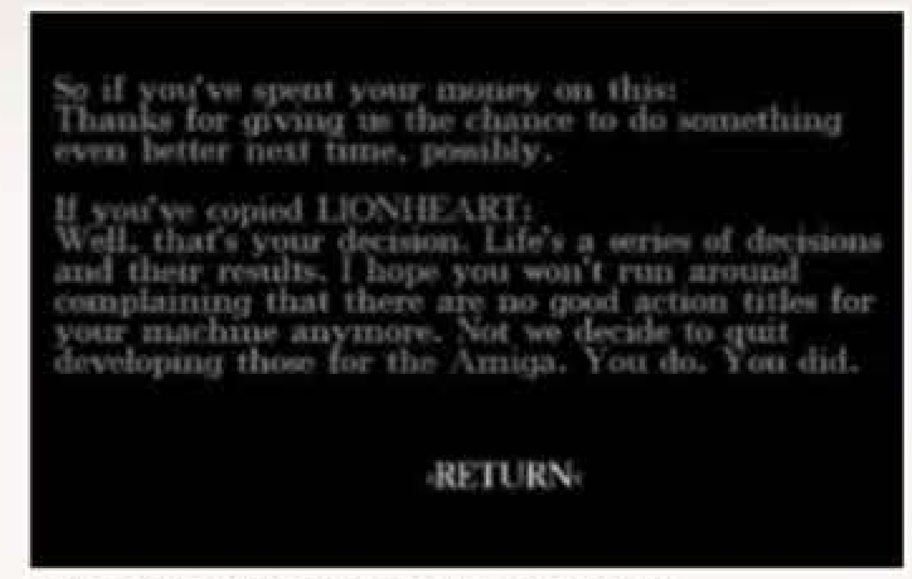
How the cream of the demo scene came to be

One of the things that made Thalion unique was that it was formed by members of the best demo scene groups in Europe. The two founders were both members of The Exceptions. They had coders, musicians and artists from The Lost Boys, TNT Crew, Gigabyte Crew, Quartermass Experiment and The CareBears among others. People like Jochen Hippel, Michael Bittner and Fabian Hammer had become heroes to many 16-bit computer fans as they continually pushed the ST and Amiga to do things nobody thought was possible, and this is why Thalion always had a reputation for producing technically brilliant games. Many ex-members of Thalion are still active in the demo scene today and continue to wow audiences at conventions across Europe with their coding skills. One quick search on YouTube will show you just what these people have been able to achieve and the legacy they have left.





» [Amiga] *Lionheart* is still regarded as having some of the best graphics to appear on Commodore's Amiga.



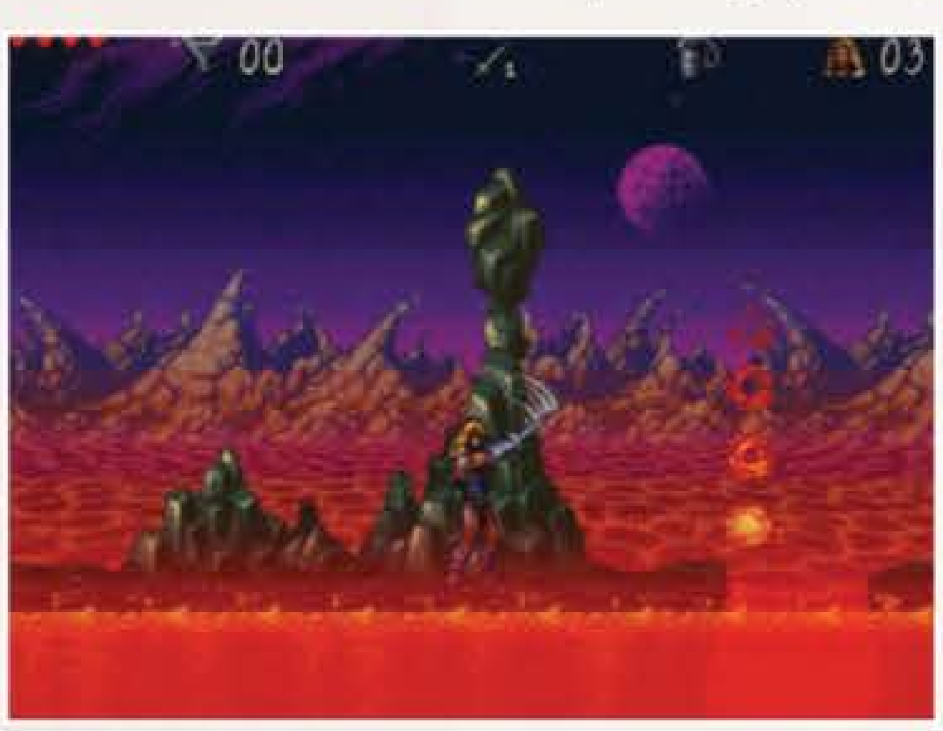
» [Amiga] Thalion liked to let the pirates know that it was watching them!

▶ Amiga were no easy feats," explains Erik about Thalion's technical edge.

Jurie 'Relayer' Horneman was brought in by Erik and heaped the praise on his then boss for what Thalion was able to achieve. "The company was founded by the best demo makers for the Atari ST, people who pulled off the impossible. Everyone was really talented, but particularly the programmers. We wanted to make the best games we could, and we did. It was a small team with very strong leadership by Erik Simon, so a lot of problems I've seen later in my career just didn't occur." Jurie also recalls seeing something special the first day he set foot in the office… "During my interview in January 1991, I looked over the shoulder of Michael Bittner and my jaw dropped as I saw a texture-mapped cube rotating smoothly in 3D on an Atari ST, which was supposed to be impossible!" Jurie also remembers having to adjust to game coding after programming for so many years. "At some point during the development of *Amberstar* I came to the painful realisation that I would have to use the operating system, which went against my instincts as a demo coder." He even explained his own approach to the process: "Step One: Kill OS. Step Two: Do awesome things. But I realised it'd be too much work to manually code support for German keyboards, French keyboards, etc. So I grudgingly started using the operating system."

Jurie's fellow Quartermass Experiment member Richard 'Cronos' Karsmakers was the storyteller at Thalion; he helped design the games and set the scene behind them, and he was in awe of what his colleagues could achieve, telling us, "I worked with the cream of the cream. The top graphics artist (Erik Simon), the best sound programmer (Jochen Hippel of course) and the best programmer ever (Nicolas Thisell). We had a lot of scene respect, that was awesome."

David 'Spaz' Moss was part of the legendary demo group The Lost Boys and made up part of Thalion's overseas crew, having joined the company straight from school. As a 16-year-old boy he didn't really know what to expect on his first day of work. "For me, Thalion didn't really feel like what I had always imagined a proper job would be," he begins. "It was more a collection of like-minded people who enjoyed creating games. Most people who worked there came from similar backgrounds of bedroom coding and art. Although we came from all over Europe we all got on really well." Michael 'Daryl' Raasch was a fellow member of The Exceptions along with Erik,



» [Mobile] Amiga hit *Lionheart* was remade for the PC and mobile platforms several years ago.



"For me, Thalion didn't really feel like what I had always imagined a proper job would be"

DAVID MOSS

TIMELINE

1988 THE COMPANY WAS FORMED BY MEMBERS OF THE ATARI ST DEMO SCENE IN GÜTERSLOH, GERMANY. A DEAL IS QUICKLY SIGNED WITH ARIOLASOFT TO PUBLISH ITS GAMES IN GERMANY WITH GRANDSLAM ENTERTAINMENT BECOMING THALION'S UK PARTNERS.

1989 CHAMBERS OF SHAOLIN BECOMES THE FIRST GAME TO BE RELEASED BY THE NEWLY-FOUNDED COMPANY. A TRADITIONAL ONE-ON-ONE FIGHTING GAME FOR THE ATARI ST, IT RECEIVES FAVOURABLE REVIEWS. CONVERSIONS TO THE AMIGA AND COMMODORE 64 FOLLOW THE YEAR AFTER.

1990 THALION RELEASES ITS FIRST AND ONLY COMPILATION FOR THE ATARI ST AND AMIGA. TITLED THALION: THE FIRST YEAR, IT FEATURES THE GAMES CHAMBERS OF SHAOLIN, LEAVIN' TERAMIS, SEVEN GATES OF JAMBALA AND WARP AS WELL AS A VERY SMART THALION T-SHIRT.

1991 THALION RELEASES A320 AIRBUS, AN EXTREMELY REALISTIC FLIGHT SIMULATOR. THE GAME IS DEVELOPED WITH HELP FROM AIRBUS ITSELF, AS WELL AS GERMAN AIRLINE LUFTHANSA, AND IS FOLLOWED BY A STRING OF DATA DISKS TO PROVIDE NEW SCENARIOS.

1992 THIS YEAR SAW THE DEBUT OF THE FIRST GAME IN THE AMBER TRILOGY. AMBERSTAR IS RELEASED FOR THE ST, AMIGA AND PC TO FAVOURABLE PRESS. THE SEQUEL AMBERMOON IS ONLY EVER RELEASED ON THE AMIGA WITH THE ST AND PC VERSIONS NEVER SEEING THE LIGHT OF DAY. THE THIRD GAME IS CANCELLED WITH THE DEMISE OF THALION TWO YEARS LATER.

1993 THALION RELEASES ITS LAST GAME FOR THE ATARI ST, THE SYSTEM IT BEGAN ON. NO SECOND PRIZE WOULD RECEIVE RAVE REVIEWS AND IS STILL WELL REMEMBERED TODAY. IT SHOWED THERE WAS STILL LIFE LEFT IN THE OLD DOG YET WITH ITS 3D POLYGON GRAPHICS.

1994 THALION FINALLY CLOSES ITS DOORS AFTER IT RUNS OUT OF MONEY. BOTH BLUE BYTE AND ECLIPSE ARE FORMED OUT OF THE ASHES, THE LATTER OF WHICH GOES ON TO MAKE A SEQUEL TO THALION'S MOST POPULAR GAME, WINGS OF DEATH, CALLED LETHAL XCESS.

1995 IT IS ANNOUNCED IN THE PRESS THAT THALION IS MAKING A COMEBACK WITH A GAME CALLED X-FIGHTER FOR THE AMIGA A1200 AND CD32. THE GAME RECEIVES GENERALLY POSITIVE REVIEWS IN THE PRESS BUT ISN'T RELEASED AND NOTHING IS EVER HEARD OF THALION AGAIN.

Jochen and Udo. He was one of the original people to join Thalion and worked on its first project *Dragonflight*, so we leave the final words on this subject to him. As one of their 'genius' coders he pretty much sums up what made Thalion so special back in the day namely "each individual's commitment and dedication", adding that "the mix of talented people we were able to attract from all over Europe was simply amazing."

Unsurprisingly, camaraderie played a big part of Thalion; they didn't just work together, they lived together and remain good friends to this day. And when we say live together, we really mean it, as many of them were even residing in the Thalion building. David Moss in particular remembers his first stay in Gütersloh, explaining that he was "sleeping on the floor and washing at the swimming pool as the office we all slept in didn't have any facilities. It was just like living in student digs." Henk Nieborg, being a Dutch resident, was another one who was only too happy to buy into the lifestyle of his new country. "The first half-year when moving to Germany, me and Erwin Kloibhofer resided in the Thalion Gütersloh office. Kind of crazy when you think of it, but it somehow seemed normal to us." Michael Raasch was also no stranger to the experience, proudly recalling the following anecdote. "We lived the dot-com lifestyle, including sleeping bags and big amounts of pizza, even before the term 'dot-com' existed!"

Of course, when you all live and work together, the fun and games ensue, and the 'fax wars' seem to be the stuff of legend at Thalion. This was a game played between all the different groups within Thalion and something that eventually got the group into a lot of trouble! David Moss was quick to chirp up when it came to this subject, telling us, "my best memory was the fax wars with the CareBears, for which we got a right telling off." Richard Karsmakers was in agreement recalling that "summer 1990, was a hot one. We spent days and nights working and did 'fax wars' between the local team (The Lost Boys) and a foreign team (The CareBears). We also drank a lot of the divine liquid!" Erik Simon remembers a different contest though:



» [Amiga] The less said about *X-Fighter* the better, we should be thankful this game was never released!

"what about the dirty joke gross-out battle between the Dutch and the Scandinavian guys?" Michael Raasch, on the other hand, offered his own favourite. "[It] has to be when Andreas Franz has shown us how to extract the laser tubes from Video-CD players and convert them to laser pointers. We scared the hell out of the Italian pizza bakers opposite the office!" It's clear from talking to the individuals at Thalion that having fun was every much as big a part of Thalion as actually writing games.

Thalion continued to release quality games right into the early Nineties, but one thing had always eluded it: widespread commercial success. Among Amiga and ST owners Thalion had a very solid reputation, but this is where it ended, and the console market was soon ▶



THE DNA OF…

GREAT GRAPHICS

Thalion was known for producing excellent visuals in its games. It managed to make both the Atari ST and Amiga show more colours on-screen than people thought possible. On the ST it created screens that displayed hundreds of colours when the machine was supposed to be limited to just 16. Thalion also created special interlace modes that boosted the on-screen resolution too. Both of these can be seen in *Leavin' Teramis*, while *Lionheart* is a great example of what it was able to achieve with the Amiga.

MARVELLOUS MUSIC

Ask anyone that owned a 16-bit home computer who the best musician was and a name that will come up again and again is Jochen Hippel. The man known as Mad Max was able to push the ST's much-maligned sound chip beyond limits that nobody thought was possible while also showing what made the Amiga's so great. Of course he was not alone, and other musicians like Gunnar 'Big Alec' Gaubatz and Steve 'Skinnybone' Collet also chipped in. The fact that Thalion released studio albums of its musical work tells you all you need to know about how great it was.

THALION

STUPENDOUS STORIES

Another thing that Thalion took real pride in was the storytelling in its games. Richard Karsmakers was the man who was mostly responsible for this but many of the programmers also chipped in with their own novellas. Thalion didn't just put a short story in the manual or on the back of the box, it went the whole hog and sometimes even included a book with the game. Its RPGs were widely praised by the press for going this extra mile when it came to setting the scene and introducing you to the characters. Thalion thought it was important that you became involved in every aspect of the story.



PARTY PEOPLE

One thing that the guys at Thalion really knew how to do was party! When it came to burning the candle at both ends, they had it down to a fine art. With many of its staff living in the actual building and others sleeping there just to get projects finished there was never a boring moment. The Germans are famous for their beer, and Thalion embraced this and used it to fuel its creative talents. The work/life balance was definitely very different to most of the other major software houses around Europe and was one of the many things the team brought with them from the demo scene days.

DEFINING GAMES

WINGS OF DEATH



Described by many as being the best shoot-'em-up on the Atari ST, *Wings Of Death* remains a great example of what the machine can do in the right hands. It automatically detects what type of machine you are playing it on and allocates additional resources such as digital audio, blitter effects and an expanded colour palette for the STe and TT machines. *Wings Of Death* is also particularly notable for its soundtrack by Jochen Hippel that is equally as impressive on the Atari ST as it is on the Commodore Amiga. It was followed by a sequel called *Lethal Xcess*.

NO SECOND PRIZE



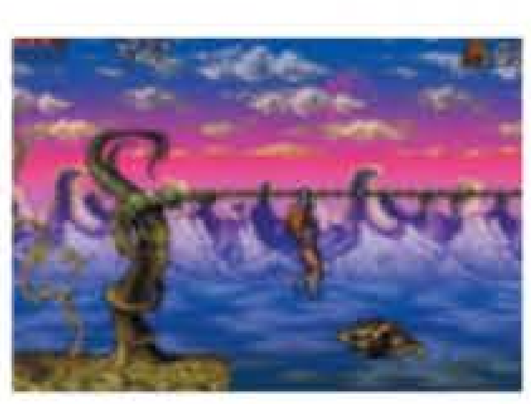
Programmed by Christian Jungen, *No Second Prize* is renowned by both Amiga and ST owners as being one of the most impressive examples of 3D polygon graphics on either machine. It features 20 international racetracks, six different racers (each with their own individual abilities) and several unique racing bikes. *No Second Prize* was a realistic simulation of motorcycle racing as opposed to an arcade-style racer like Sega's *Super Hang-On*. The game received rave scores in all the computer magazines of the time and went on to become one of Thalion's most successful games.

AMBERSTAR



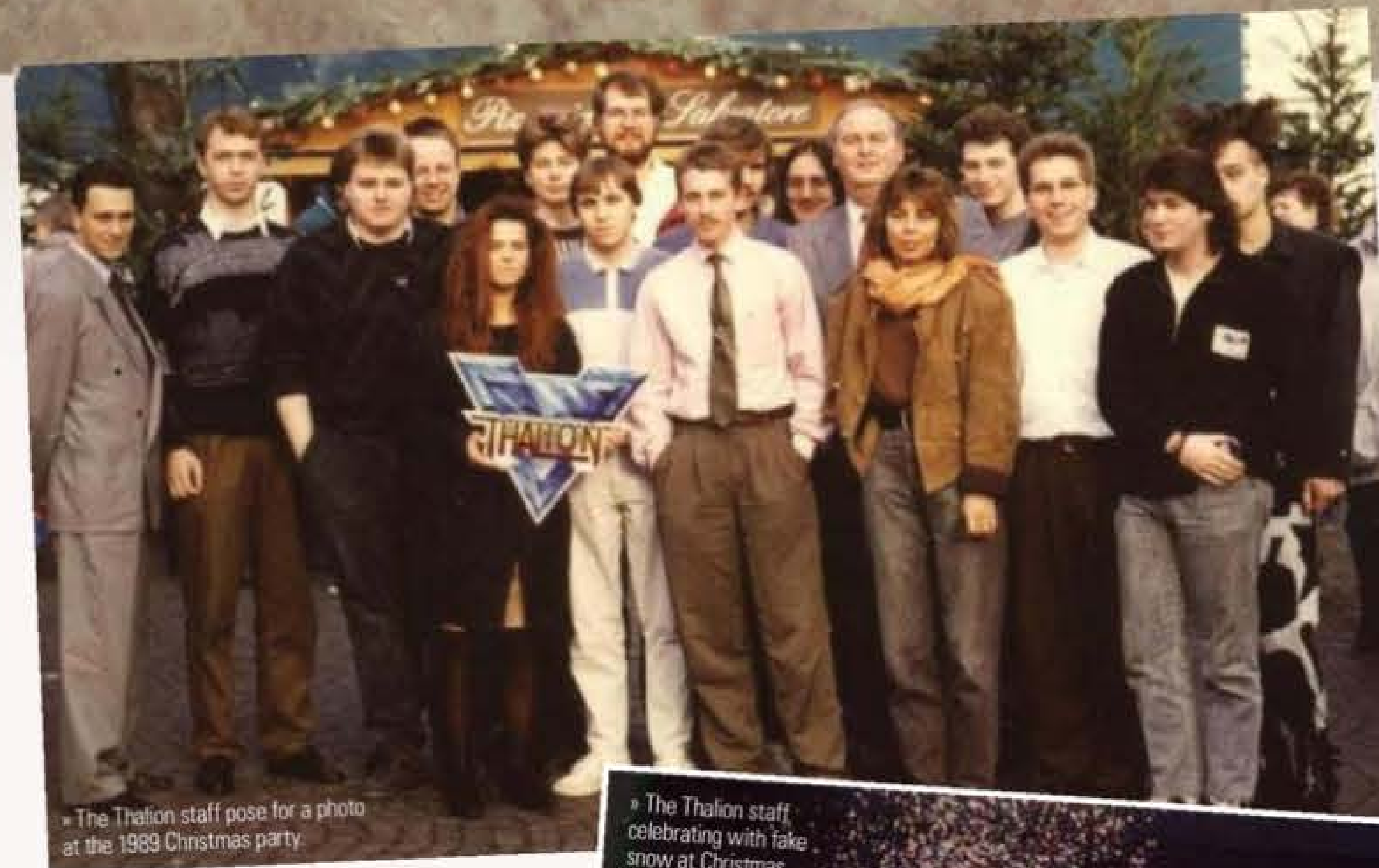
Amberstar is part one of the never completed *Amber Trilogy* and also billed as the follow-up to *Dragon Flight*. The magical Amberstar is a talisman, used a millennia ago to banish the evil demon lord, Lord Tarbos, to the third moon of Lyramion. Split into 13 pieces and scattered throughout the land, your quest is to reunite the Amberstar and defeat the returning danger. The game came with a huge parchment style map and a small novel by Jurie Horneman that goes deeper into the story of the game. The sequel to the game was the equally huge *Ambermoon*.

LIONHEART



Lionheart was unusual for a Thalion game as it was only released for the Commodore Amiga. Designed by Erik Simon, coded by Erwin Kloibhofer and Michael Bittner with graphics from Henk Nieborg it is a stunning looking platform game with a fantasy theme. When *Amiga Power* reviewed *Lionheart* it described it as a "must buy game" and *The One* was so impressed by it that it dedicated four pages to the review and said that it "set new standards for Amiga platformers." The main character from the game also makes an appearance in another Thalion title, *Ambermoon*.

"Seven years was quite a long time to survive in those early days, which were pretty Wild West"
ERIK SIMON



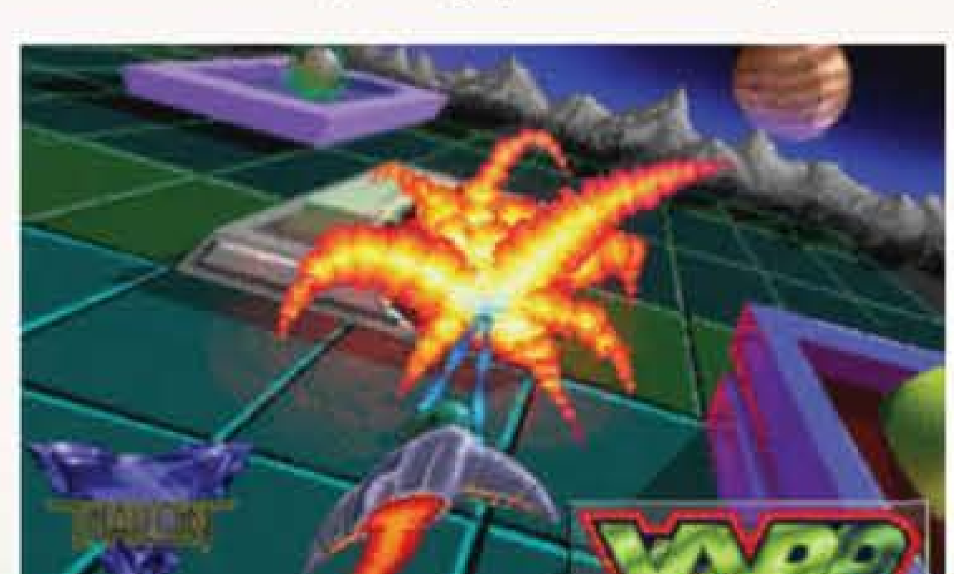
» The Thalion staff pose for a photo at the 1989 Christmas party.



» The Thalion staff celebrating with fake snow at Christmas in 1990.

▶ becoming the next big thing. Thalion was also being damaged badly by the rampant piracy in the 16-bit computer scene, ironic considering the roots of the demo scene were very much intertwined with various hacking groups. Erik Simon expanded on this a bit for us. "We had some more and some less successful titles but they were all impacted by piracy as much as the other companies back then." Money was another issue for Thalion, and it eventually ran out of money again. Erik isn't bitter however, summing up Thalion's "successful and fun ride" in a single sentence. "Seven years was quite a long time to survive in those early days, which were pretty Wild West – especially from a project management and business administration point of view." Richard Karsmakers believes the writing was on the wall for Thalion when its owners started to stick their noses in. "I know we were basically owned by Bertelsmann and as commercial success remained elusive, they wanted ever more of a say in the creative process," he explains. "That is when we started doing games like *Airport FRA*, *Atomix* and *Ghost Battle*, which were not done in-house. Wolfgang Meier and Willi Carmincke were, to me, the face of that unwelcome influence. At that time Holger (Flöttmann the co-founder) had no say anymore and I recall he wasn't even allowed into the offices anymore!"

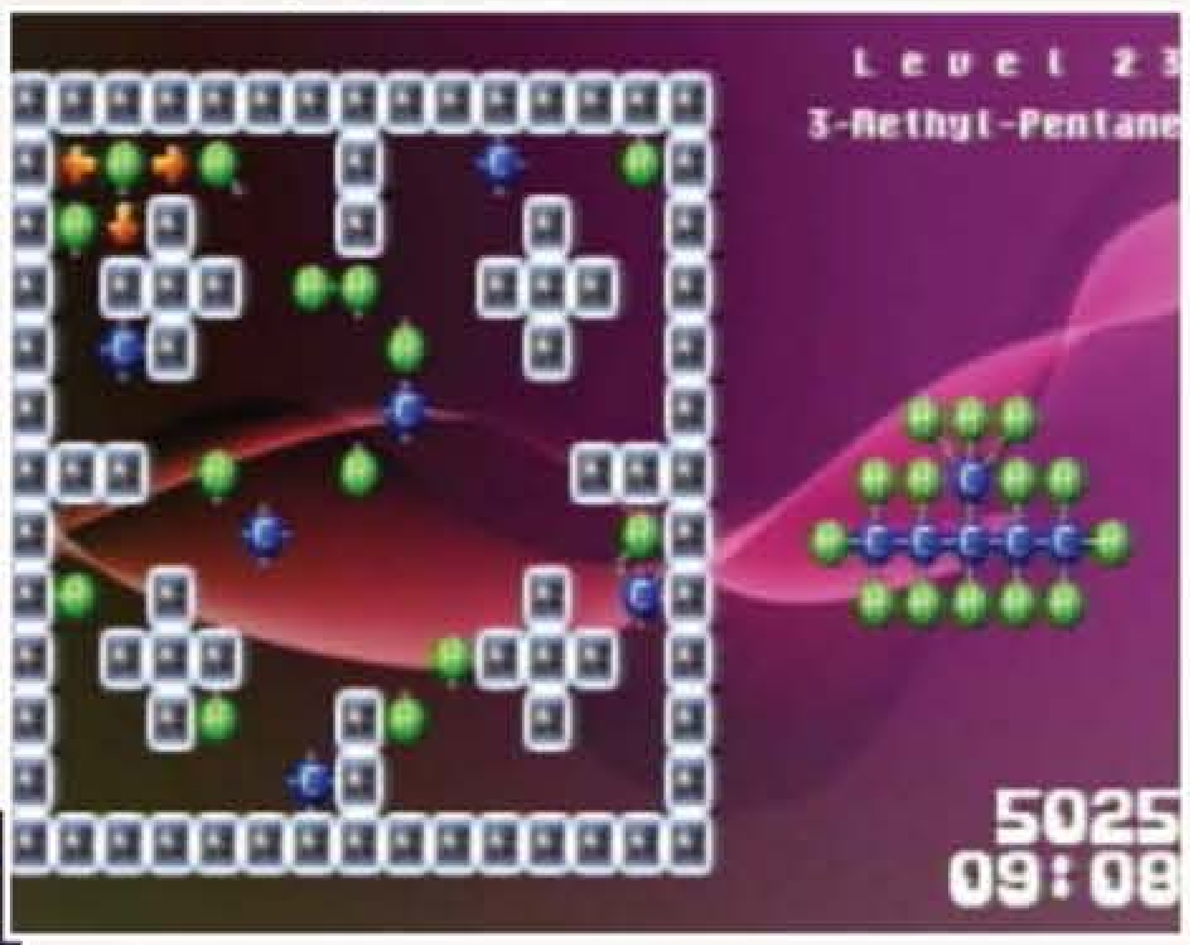
Interestingly this wasn't quite the end of the Thalion story though, as it came up for one unexpected last gasp of breath, as Alexander Holland explains. Although he never worked for Thalion (he was actually employed by Argonaut and was one of the programmers of *StarFox 2*) he is the man behind the Thalion Web Shrine and has done a lot of research into the history of the company. Alexander tells us how Thalion seemed to be making a comeback in 1995 after everyone thought the developer was no more. "There was talk in magazines about Thalion (after everyone had left) going on to publish a game called *X-Fighter*," he begins, before going on to reveal that it wasn't just talk. "There were magazine interviews and even a demo cover disk; this was all done by the remaining management on the cheap." And when Alexander says cheap, he means cheap. "The game was written by a kid in his bedroom in AMOS!" *X-Fighter* was nothing more than a very poor



» [Atari ST] Thalion produced some amazing loading screens for its games, typically using an impressive number of colours.



» Thalion gave away this pin badge with some of its games.



» [Jaguar] *Atomix* was ported to the Atari Jaguar by The Removers in 2006.

Street Fighter II rip-off, it looked terrible when compared to the console games of the time and was crucified by the press. So it will come as no surprise to hear the game was never released, and that was the last anyone heard of Thalion. It's a shame that the legacy of a company that prided itself on technical innovation and originality was blighted by such an abomination. We shouldn't let that last desperate attempt by the owners of the name to tarnish the legacy of Thalion however, it deserves much more than that.

Given the talent that was present in the Thalion ranks it wasn't long before they all found new places to deliver their talents. Some joined Erik Simon at fellow German software company Blue Byte, which is now part of Ubisoft and most famous for games like *The Settlers* and the *Battle Isle* series. Former Thalion coder Marc Rosocha (who now heads up EA's mobile division) had already left to form Eclipse and several other people joined him there too. Eclipse went on to produce a sequel to *Wings Of Death* called *Lethal Xcess*, and later became famous for the *Iron Soldier* games on the Atari Jaguar and Sony PlayStation. The biggest success story, though, was Tim 'Manikin' Moss, brother of David, who went on to join Sony and was the lead programmer on the *God Of War* games.

Some members of Thalion even went back to the demo scene and continue to push the 16-bit computers to new limits to this very day. The most elusive of all the Thalion team was Nic Thiesell, who programmed the most technically advanced games effects of the time. He went on to pioneer Java games programming after leaving the company. In 1997 he wrote a version of *Quake* in Java when others were just doing *Solitaire*. id software was so impressed by it that it set its lawyers on him and forced him to remove all the *Quake* assets from the game. It later re-emerged as *Frag Island*, but Nic himself dropped off the map after switching to theoretical physics. Sadly, Jochen 'Mad Max' Hippel left the industry completely after working on *Turrican 3* and is something of a recluse, his talent is a big loss to the videogames world.

Thalion – it wowed Amiga owners with the gorgeous graphics in *Lionheart*, stunned ST owners with the fast 3D of *No Second Prize* and impressed PC owners with the realism of *A320 Airbus*. The real success of Thalion was always the people – the graphic artists, programmers and musicians that made those games possible and their legacy can still be seen today. ★

Thanks to: Erik Simon, Alexander Holland, Michael Raasch, David Moss, Henk Nieborg, Richard Karsmakers, Jurie Horneman, Jamie Varlese and Darren Doyle. For more information see thalion.exotica.org.uk

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Erik Simon



A lot of team members, including co-founder Erik Simon, left to join fellow German software house Blue Byte where they worked on a vast amount of the company's titles. While there he grew into the role of executive producer and then head of development. Erik has been employed in a similar role at several other companies ever since. His last job was building up a development team in Berlin for Bigpoint.

Jurie Horneman



One of the last developers left at the end of 1993, he joined founder Erik Simon at Blue Byte in the beginning of 1994. While there he developed a role-playing game called *Albion*. After that he moved to France (he is originally from the Netherlands) and then to Austria. Jurie worked as a producer at both JoWooD and Rockstar Games before founding his own company, Mipumi Games. After 12 years there and getting married, he moved back to France and is currently living in Lyon working as an independent game designer.

David Moss

Since leaving Thalion, David has continued working as an artist in the games industry for big companies as well as freelance jobs and still really enjoys making game art. Over the last few years he has worked on a number of well-received games including the BAFTA-nominated *Great Big War Game* (iOS/Android) and the recent *Combat Monsters* (iOS/Android/PC), which has been picking up some great press of late.



Henk Nieborg

Henk joined fellow Thalion staffer Erwin Kloibhofer freelancing where they both got hired by Psygnosis. While there they did *The Misadventures Of Flink* for Sega Mega Drive and *The Adventures Of Lomax* for Sony PlayStation. These days Henk is still involved in smaller projects for the Nintendo 3DS and other handheld platforms while also helping out with smaller indie projects, something he enjoys very much. While Henk has also done quite a bit of high-res and 3D stuff, it's classic 2D that still drives and defines him as an artist.

Michael Raasch



After departing Thalion Michael went to Eclipse where we worked on *Lethal Xcess*, the sequel to Thalion's *Wings Of Death*. From there he went to university to study computer science. This then paved a route into investment banking developing trading systems for companies such as UBS and Barclays. Michael is currently working in London for two internet start-ups as co-founder and CTO.

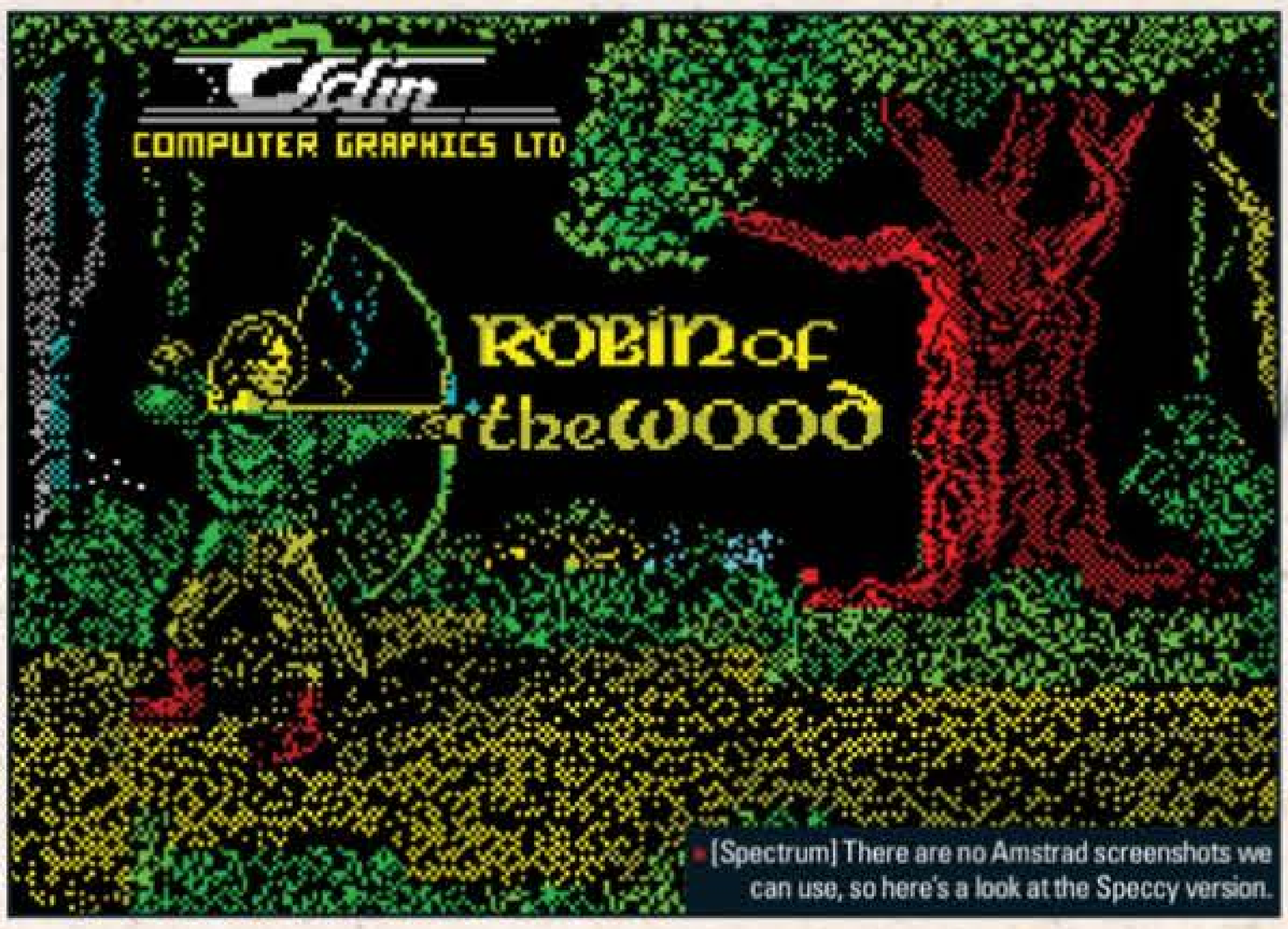


» [Amiga] Hank from *King Of The Hill* goes on holiday in *Tower FRA* on the Amiga.

THE AMSTRAD CPC GAMES THAT TIME FORGOT



The Amstrad CPC may not have had many exclusives, but there was an expectation that a game on another 8-bit system would find its way to Alan Sugar's baby. It wasn't always the case. David Crookes looks at the greatest CPC games never to get a release



» [Spectrum] There are no Amstrad screenshots we can use, so here's a look at the Speccy version.

ROBIN OF THE WOOD

DEVELOPER: Steve Wetherill, Paul Salmon, Fred Gray
INTENDED RELEASE DATE: 1985

AN ARCADE MAZE game created for the Spectrum and the Commodore 64, *Robin Of The Wood* was set to be released by Odin and it appears that work had started on the game. A preview in the March 1986 issue of *Amtix* magazine said gamers would play the part of Robin attempting to get to an archery competition in one piece. "Now drool over the pictures," said the *Amtix* reporter pointing towards two screenshots on the page. "From what we've seen of the game so far, we'll think it [the £9.95 price tag] will be worth it."

Although the magazine said it would be out soon, it never arrived in the shops. "As I recall, work was underway on the CPC version, and development was contracted out to a programmer from Leeds," says Steve Wetherill, who worked on the other two versions. "I seem to recall that there were technical problems with the game and that it was at an early stage of development when it was cancelled. I have a suspicion that the screenshots in *Amtix* were composed in a paint package, but I could be wrong about that. I don't remember it looking like that in its playable or runnable form." It's a shame the game did not get a CPC release given that *Your Sinclair* awarded the game 9/10.

DISCOVERY PROSPECTS: Very slim. We have been unable to get word from the programmer Laurie Sinnet, and Steve tells us he doesn't remember seeing the game running in such a complete-looking state as it did in the CPC screenshots within *Amtix*.

TOKI

DEVELOPER: Ocean
INTENDED RELEASE DATE: 1991



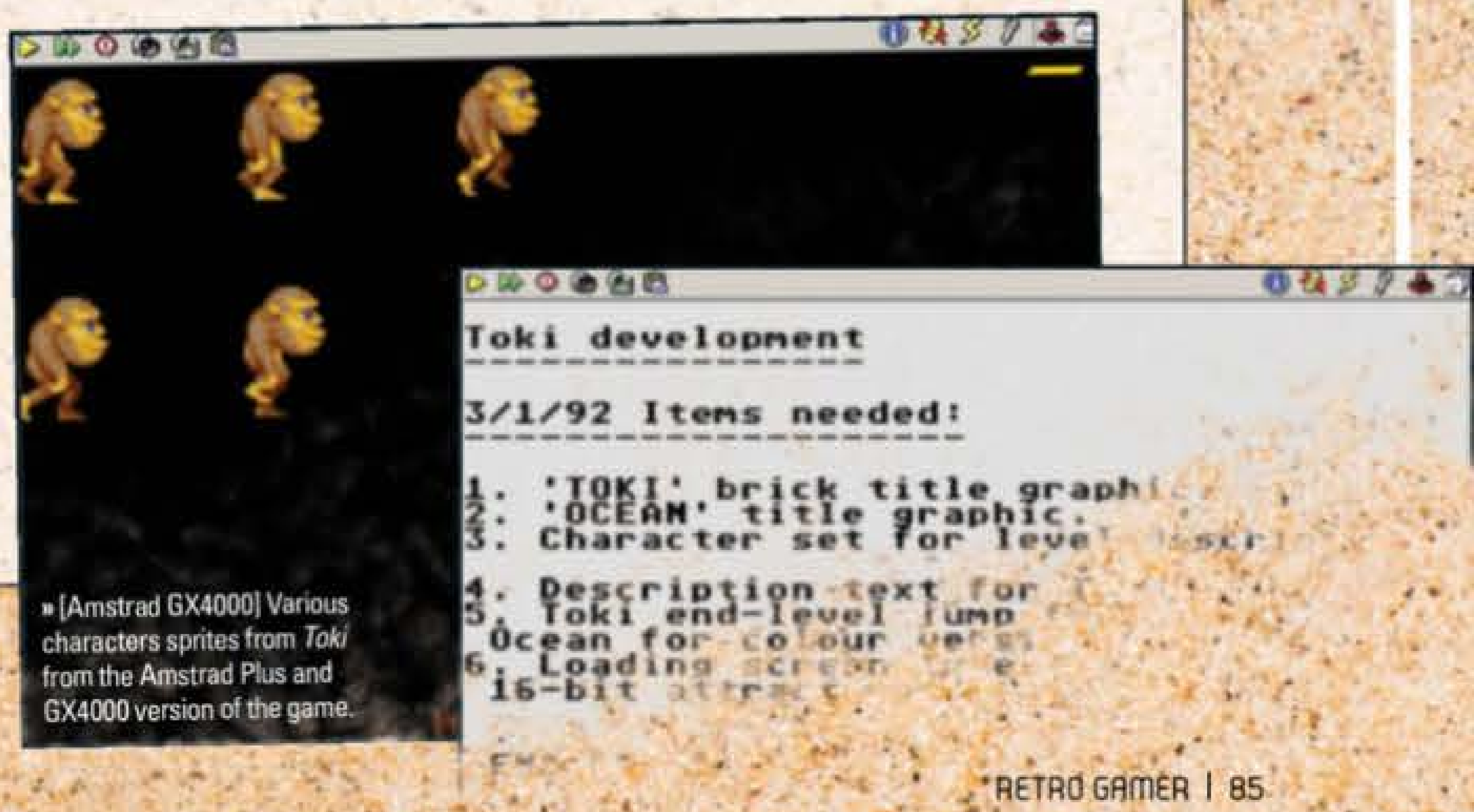
WHEN **RETRO GAMER**'S Martyn Carroll looked at unreleased Spectrum games, one of the entries he made was Ocean's conversion of the TAD Corp coin-op, *Toki*. As he pointed out, the game should have swung its way on to the Spectrum 128K.

At the time, Dave Locker who worked on the game with his son, John, promised he would search through some boxes in his shed to find any possible Speccy assets. Although he says he still hasn't had chance to pop into his shed, he has had a dig around in his loft – and his endeavours have yielded a surprising result.

"I came across a couple of disks which have '*Toki* screens' and '*Toki* project' written on the labels. They are 3.5 inch Atari ST disks, but I don't have any means of checking what's on them as I don't even have a PC with a floppy drive these days," he said. Within a few days, the discs were in Martyn's hands so that he could work out whether or not they would work via a Spectrum emulator, but he could only find *Toki* character sprites and no code. But this is where things get exciting: Dave has since confirmed that the sprites are from the Amstrad Plus/GX4000 version of the game.

This version, like that for the Spectrum, was canned when the programmers realised the sprites would take up too much memory. The cartridge size Ocean wanted to use for the GX4000 and Plus machines was not big enough so while the first level was finished, there was no space for other levels. "As to the date, I really can't remember exactly when the project was cancelled, but it's quite possible that it dragged on into early 1992," Dave says.

DISCOVERY PROSPECTS: There is a chance that the first level of the game will be unearthed from Dave's shed in due course so we can only sit back and wait in hope that this will be the case. With a bit of luck we could have an update on this in the future, but for now, it's great to see a set of character sprites from the game still remain in digital form.



» [Amstrad GX4000] Various characters sprites from *Toki* from the Amstrad Plus and GX4000 version of the game.

KILLING FIST

DEVELOPER: Genix
INTENDED RELEASE DATE: 1992

MENTIONED FOR THE first time in the French magazine *Amstrad Cent Pour Cent* in September 1991, this beautiful looking game appeared to originate at a European demo party in July of that year and it was being put together by a seven-man development team which called itself Genix. The magazine said the beat-'em-up would have overscan graphics, pushing the CPC to its limits and also making use of the capabilities of the Amstrad Plus range of computers. The French software publisher Silmarils was to release the game. It was also going to have sampled sound.

"I remember I was disappointed [when the game was canned] because the game already looked promising but I forget the reason it was abandoned," musician Christian Lier, aka WEEE!, tells us. But Kalle 'Thriller' Rechberg is able to fill in some more details. "I have in mind that I was asked to do the intro and I started coding it," he says. "I already finished some code for a background area with very slow moving clouds and faster ground on which I wanted to have some fighting sprites." He says he was waiting for some graphics to appear from one of those working on the game but they didn't arrive and eventually "the whole thing petered out".

Killing Fist would have been one of a new breed of Amstrad CPC games created and released in the early Nineties. Although Amstrad said that the Plus capabilities of its new computers could only be used by cartridge games, programmers discovered that wasn't the case at all. They could also be accessed by games on disk and tape.

Being able to access the 4,096-colour palette and built-in sprites made a big difference to the appearance of games and developers were keen to take advantage. Demo programmers were always keen to showcase their talents at pushing the limits of the Amstrad CPC so used these features well, but even professional coders saw the advantages the extra effort would yield. Codemasters released *Striker In The Crypts Of Trogan* in 1992, showing how cassette games could benefit from these additional abilities. It looked great and it catered for Plus owners let down by the lack of cartridge releases.

DISCOVERY PROSPECTS: A demo of *Killing Fist* is said to exist that includes the title screen, but it has proven very difficult to track down. Kalle says he does not recall a demo having been released, however, so it would appear that the prospects of uncovering this game in the future would be very slim.





REPTON 3

DEVELOPER: Superior Software
INTENDED RELEASE DATE: 1987

ALTHOUGH THE REPTON games were very closely associated with the BBC Micro and Acorn Electron, the Commodore 64 and Spectrum saw ports of *Repton 3*. The CPC, however, did not see a version of this game even though it had been promised in advertisements leading up to the planned release in 1987.

By this stage, the programmer behind the first two games, Tim Tyler, had decided he did not want do any more and so the baton was passed to Matthew Atkinson. Tim tells us that he had never heard about an Amstrad CPC version of *Repton 3* at all, although he designed some levels for *Repton 3* in general so his work would have ended up in the game, we guess, had it ever come to fruition.

It falls to Richard Hanson, founder of Superior Software to explain more, though. "Basically I think it came down to a commercial decision considering the Amstrad CPC software market," he says. "Superior mainly focussed on the Acorn software market (BBC Micro, Acorn Electron and Archimedes computers) at that time. If I recall correctly the project was started but the development stopped before it reached an advanced stage." Richard says that sales of games on the CPC were "relatively low" in comparison to the Acorn Electron and BBC Micro which may have prompted the decision.

As fate would have it, a programmer called Kevin Thacker attempted to right this wrong in 2008 and produce his own CPC version of *Repton 3*, basing the graphics on the BBC Micro version. Wanting to be above board, he asked Superior Software for permission to launch his game but was turned down. "I had all the levels converted, the front-end working, the scrolling and most of the in-game logic," he wrote on the CPC Wiki forum. He abandoned his game too, meaning there are two failed attempts at *Repton 3* on the Amstrad CPC.

DISCOVERY PROSPECTS: Kevin refuses to release his version, wanting to abide by the promise he made to Superior Software that he would not do so (although he says he will ask again in the future), but the chances of finding the original attempted CPC version are incredibly small given that Richard cannot remember the full story behind the reasons why it was eventually abandoned. It is likely the files have since been lost over the course of time. "There are none that I am aware of," Richard says.

JUDGE DREDD

DEVELOPER: Melbourne House
INTENDED RELEASE DATE: 1990

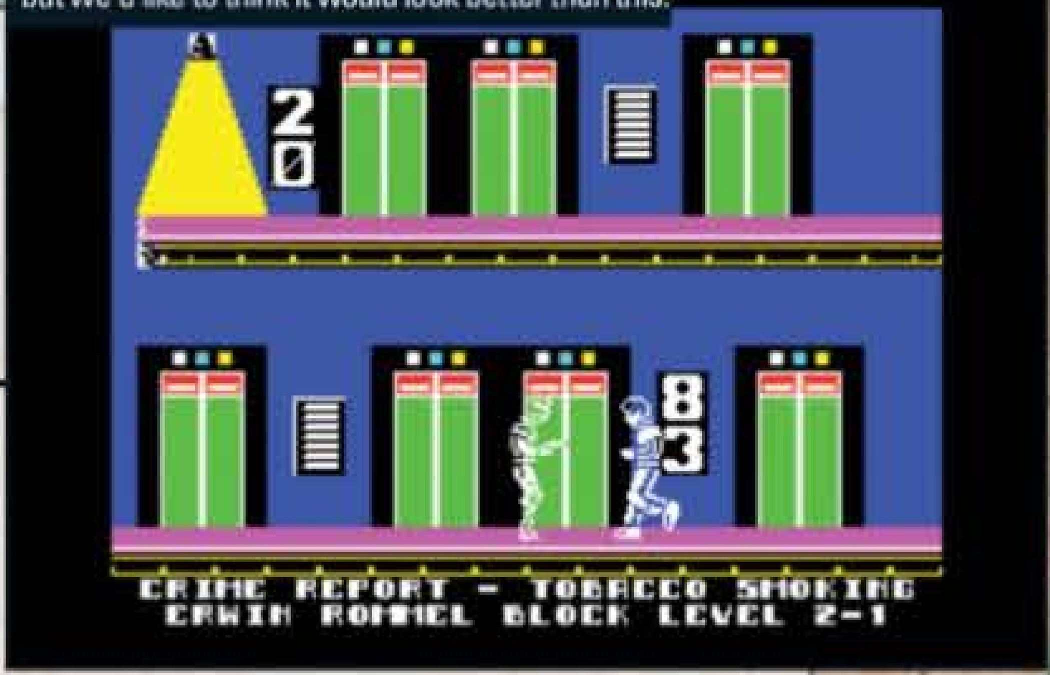
MAKING THE FRONT cover of *Amstrad Computer User* in September 1990 was *Judge Dredd*, the expected CPC game given a centre-spread preview. "*Judge Dredd* looks set to be a blockbuster of the highest order, with first-class graffix and wonderfully smooth scrolling," wrote John Taylor.

Set to be published by Virgin Games, a CPC screen was used in the adverts for the game although it looked very much like the Commodore 64 screenshot in terms of colour scheme. Research into what happened to the game has thrown up a blank with even Ian Malcolm, former Beam Software/Melbourne House programmer, surprised that a CPC version wasn't released. "It seems an odd omission, since at that point most of the other notable games such as *Usagi* and *LOTR* were still done for C64, Speccy and CPC," he says.

Another *2000AD* game, *Judge Death*, was also due to be released on the Amstrad CPC but never got an airing. It was to be an *Operation Wolf*-style shooter with 3D graphics. A Commodore 64 version has surfaced in pretty much its full form but the game was axed on all formats because publisher Pirahna didn't like the end results. The firm went bust before the game could find its way on to shop shelves.

DISCOVERY PROSPECTS: Unlikely. Any work on *Judge Dredd* will surely be long gone by now. "I vaguely recall seeing old sketch/concept art around the place for one version or another, which got thrown out when the company cleaned up and moved from the Tope Street studio to Park Street," says Ian.

[Spectrum] We may never see the Amstrad version, but we'd like to think it would look better than this.





CODEMASTERS GAMESPACK CD

Whatever happened to the Amstrad CPC version?

Offering 30 games for £19.95, this could well have just been another bargain basement Codemasters offering of budget titles. But it came with a twist – the games were on CD. Players would pop the CD into their existing CD player and hook it up via a special cable to the joystick port of the CPC. The Spectrum and C64 versions appeared but the CPC one did not. "I did the loader and mastering for the Spectrum and Amstrad version," former *Dizzy* programmer Philip Oliver told us. "I have the Spectrum and C64 versions but not the CPC so I can only imagine that, due to sales of CPC games being significantly less than the Spectrum, they would have said 'let's see how the Spectrum version sells before we release an Amstrad CPC version'. As you are aware it didn't sell very well." He says it was technically clever but that people with enough money for CD players had already upgraded to Atari STs or Amigas.



STREET FIGHTER II

DEVELOPER: US Gold
INTENDED RELEASE DATE: 1992

NEWS THAT A version of *Street Fighter II* was being worked on was announced as an exclusive in *Amstrad Action* in September 1992 as a small slot designed to whet the appetite of gamers. What is more, *AA* said the game would be released by US Gold in time for Christmas. "Rah!", it added triumphantly.

Six months later and there was a feeling of despondency. The Next Month page of issue 90 stated: "We live in eternal hope and promise we'll review it next issue. It was delayed this month." But issue 91 came and went and a review didn't appear. Things got so bad that, in issue 95, the game took pride of place on the front cover of the magazine with the strapline: "*Street Fighter II*: The Story So Far" in an attempt to explain the situation more clearly.

The editorial told readers that the development team was based in France and it was causing some communication problems. There had been, it added, some internal issues too, and this almost lead to the team being disbanded. US Gold was reported to have said the game was still going ahead and all of the blame was placed on the development team. But after more than a year, US Gold eventually told *AA* in issue 100 of the magazine that "the release date they had on their schedules was a clerical error and there were no plans to release the game on the CPC ever". It was a mighty blow but no surprise given the length of time and also the state of the CPC market by January 1994.

We'll perhaps never know whether the game had actually been started on the CPC given this level of intrigue. There were certainly no screenshots published to illustrate the ongoing news. Simon Forrester, a staff writer on *Amstrad Action* at the time, tells **Retro Gamer**: "*Street Fighter II* came up as a game that was on the horizon – it had appeared on other formats, and so the developers were working on a port for the CPC. So we did what you do – you say 'ooh – coming soon, we'll bring you more news as we have it!' I'm assuming the thing got delayed because of development issues, but after a while it just became an enjoyable joke to crack."

DISCOVERY PROSPECTS: There is no chance of the original game being released although we suspect US Gold did start the project, canned it when the CPC market declined and then mentioned a "clerical error" to finally rid itself of repeated phone calls. In September 2013, three developers in Spain got together to produce their own *Street Fighter II* – CPC Edition. Work is ongoing but it's being made for the CPC 6128 to take advantage of its 128K. It looks amazing. "My one request would be to make sure it still has the Ryu cross-up move," says Simon.

[Amstrad CPC] Although we are very unlikely to see the original, proposed *Street Fighter II* for the CPC, this more recent version shows what it may have looked like.



LETHAL MOVES

DEVELOPER: Radical Software
INTENDED RELEASE DATE: 1995

AS THE CPC came to the end of its natural shelf life and the major software houses abandoned the format, following the audience to 16-bit, fans of Amstrad's computer plugged the gap. One of the more prolific developers was Rob Buckley whose entry here comes as a consequence of another unreleased game, the aforementioned *Street Fighter II*.

Dave Golder, then-editor of *Amstrad Action*, dearly wanted to see a game that would ignite passion for the CPC among readers when it became clear *Street Fighter II* would not be released. He approached Rob, who ran Radical Software, with the idea of him producing a *SF* alternative. Rob began to work on a game that he called *Lethal Moves*.

Boasting multiple characters, the game was to be released for 128K machines – so the CPC 6128, the 6128 Plus and expanded 464s. Rob tells us that it was going to be a mix of *SFII* and *Mortal Kombat* and that there would be unique death sequences for each character. Each of the eight fighters took up 24K of memory broken into various arms, heads, legs, torso and so on and 8K of animation and key control data.

It had parallax scrolling early on (a feature that Rob said was not definitely a shoe-in for the final version).

In February 1994, Rob spoke of the game having the basic guard, jump, punch and kick moves but he ruled out throws because of the lack of a third fire button on joysticks. Each character was to have its own special move too. But it was never released. Rob tells us he dropped the idea in May 1995 when he heard *Amstrad Action* magazine was to close.

"*Lethal Moves* was probably half way through development," he tells us. "Most of the backgrounds and fighter graphics sheets were finished as was a bespoke PC programme to animate and define the defence and strike points of each fighter. As for CPC code, not much was done apart from a demo which I'd given to *AA* when I wrote an article for them. It didn't consist of more that being able to move a single character left and right and jump on a scrolling background and wasn't part of the finished game. The basic answer is that it was a few months from release when *AA* decided to close."

DISCOVERY PROSPECTS: None whatsoever. "All my source code was deliberately destroyed by me many moons ago to stop me coding CPC stuff," he says. "[It didn't] stop me though, because I was upgrading *Sorcery* to run on the Plus machines a few months ago but as far as I know the only things that exist of *Lethal Moves* is in an *AA* interview I did."

■ [Amstrad CPC] Very few screens exist for *Lethal Moves* given that the game was announced late in the CPC's life and the destruction of the files but this shows the colourful nature of the graphics.



DON'T ABANDON ME

Rob Buckley talks Abandoned

Lethal Moves was not the only Radical Software game that did not see the light of day. Rob Buckley dropped the aptly-named *Abandoned* ("they said it couldn't be done but now the CPC has its own answer to *Doom*, a super-fast 3D adventure set on an abandoned moon," the adverts said) when *Amstrad Action* closed.

Rob was also the developer behind the excellent public domain title *Eve Of Shadows* – one of the finest CPC graphic text adventure games ever made. He was working on a sequel called *Butch Cowardice: The Undersea Adventure* but it did not get a release.

"It was a long-term project that was in development for several years but because it was a text adventure and unlikely to be that popular it was always worked on in the small gaps between other projects," he says. "It was more a personal project than any of the other Radical Software games. I'd guess it was 50 per cent finished and had a start and an end but no middle. The game was based around the idea of the Fifties B-movies/serials like *Zorro* or *King Of The Rocket Men*. It was very tongue in cheek and never took itself seriously. I was fairly influenced by my favourite Infocom game *Leather Goddess Of Phobos*. The game was based on an American hero sports player who, along with a professor, takes an experimental submarine into the ocean and gets sucked into a whirlpool and into a subterranean world. As far as I know nothing remains of it at all."

LUSITANIA AND SPARTACUS

DEVELOPER: Odin
INTENDED RELEASE DATE: 19987



■ [Amstrad] The developer warned that the game was not suitable for those with a weak nature.

HERE WE PRESENT not one but two games, both of which were developed by Odin and released in demo form on the cover tape for *Amstrad Action* issue 16. Planned for release by Firebird, neither game was released in a full form for any format.

The magazine describes *Lusitania* as a game in which you rescue gold bullion from a liner sunk at the start of the First World War. "You'll be facing all the normal underwater hazards like running out of air, hitting unexploded mines and being attacked by nasty sea monsters."

Spartacus goes back to ancient Rome. A combat game "to put you off your dinner", the magazine added. Both looked great, making use of the advanced palette of the CPC's Mode. Colourful and chunky, the games were high on action and showed some promise. "I do remember that we wanted to do *Lusitania* and *Spartacus*," says Odin chief Steve Wetherill. "There may have been artwork created (at that time there would have been at least five artists working at Odin), but I honestly don't remember anything playable. I'd be interested to see what is on that tape."

DISCOVERY PROSPECTS: The demos were released so at least parts of these two games are out there, but it was very much a case of testing the water and ultimately finding a title didn't really work commercially.

LOST… AND FOUND The Amstrad games that did make it



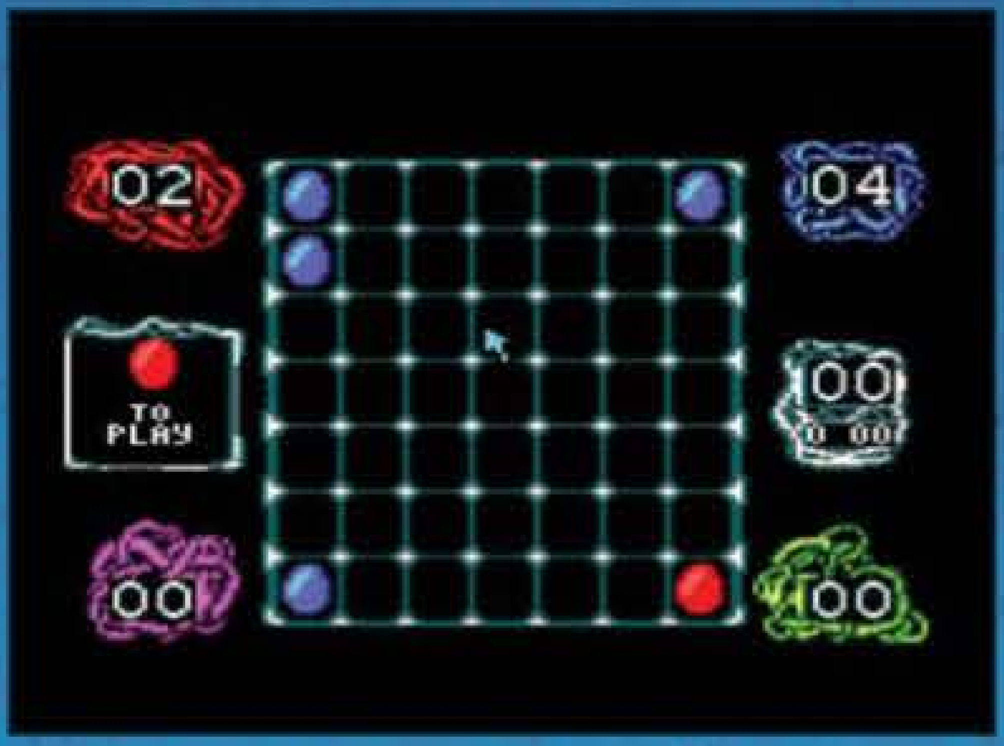
MEGA TWINS

Mega Twins had been pencilled-in for release by US Gold in 1992 and it was even reviewed by *Amstrad Computer User* magazine. "This is one blast that has to be seen to be properly appreciated," it said. That proved difficult since it was never released, but development disks later found their way on to eBay. The status area of this demo version is corrupted and it has infinite lives but it otherwise plays well.



ATLÁNTIDA 3000

Production of this game began in 1987 in Spain. It was produced on an Amstrad CPC 472 (essentially a 464 with added memory to get around import laws). Iber Soft considered publishing the game but it wanted a Spectrum version too. Porting the game to the Speccy proved problematic, so the title – which was complete – never saw daylight. It has since been made available to download online.



INFECTION

Created in 1989 by Wise Owl Software, ports of the game were later created for the PC, Spectrum and Amstrad when Virgin bought the rights to the game. The plan was to create a coin-op Infection game but Virgin became jumpy about having budget home versions around at the same time so pulled its release. Virgin rejigged the game, calling it *Spot*. The Amstrad *Infection* game subsequently surfaced on the internet.

TRASHMAN GOES MOONLIGHTING

DEVELOPER: New Generation Software
INTENDED RELEASE DATE: 1986

HOME COMPUTING WEEKLY in October 1985 claimed a third title in the *Trashman* series – *Trashman Goes Moonlighting* – was going to be imminently released for the Spectrum and Amstrad. But then things went very quiet until recently. If truth be told, there is a real grey area around this game. It was never released for the Spectrum and it was always assumed it was canned for the Amstrad too and yet, as you will see below, a discovery of a CPC version threw all of that into doubt.

To try and get to the bottom of this, programmer Malcolm Evans, founder of New Generation Software, takes up the tale. "The story of *Trashman Goes Moonlighting* on the CPC goes back a long way to before Alan Sugar introduced his CPC to the market," he says. "*Trashman* had just come out and we had received a request from Amstrad to convert the game for the CPC [in time for the imminent launch]. I looked at the possibility but the CPC's graphics software seemed to be a major limitation and I felt that it perhaps needed to be bypassed to get the speed required to run *Trashman*.

"We decided to opt out of doing the conversion ourselves but we were happy to let Amstrad try. I remember going up to Brentwood armed, to their surprise, with not only the code, but flow charts and commented listings. Three months later the Amstrad guys gave up but, by then, my brother Rod was determined and hired a company to try the conversion. They came up with the CPC version of *Trashman* which I and Rod were extremely disappointed with, but we had spent too much money on it to just forget it. So it was produced. I think the reviews reflected our own disappointments.

"When eventually we brought out *Travels With Trashman*, at its launch, I believe that Rod, in answer to a question, said we would be bringing it out for the CPC. All I had to do was look at him when he told me and that was enough. He changed his mind. His suggestion to the media that there might be a follow up, *Trashman Goes Moonlighting*, went the same way. It was never started and therefore never produced. I hope that clears up my confusion over a non-existent game." All of which means the game was never made. And yet…

DISCOVERY PROSPECTS: An Italian poster by the name of Darkgate uploaded what was said to be *Trashman Goes Moonlighting* to the CPC Wiki forum. He says he found it on a backup tape which he saw bundled with a German CPC. But Malcolm tells us: "It is not *Trashman Goes Moonlighting* at all. The game was never made so whatever the game is, it is not something produced by me."

» [Amstrad CPC] The title screen does specifically indicate the name of the game.



» [Amstrad CPC] The *Trashman Goes Moonlighting* game which appears to have surfaced plays well but we can't work out the moonlighting part – he looks like he's doing his job.



» [Amstrad CPC] The character can get run over and there is a high score table.



Future Classic

Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come



INFO

- » **Featured System:** PlayStation 3
- » **Year:** 2008
- » **Publisher:** Sega
- » **Developer:** Sega
- » **Key People:** Shuntaro Tanaka, Takaharu Terada (directors), Ryutaro Nonaka (producer), Raita Honjou (character designer)

GO DEEPER

- » ***Valkyria Chronicles* was initially developed under the working title of 'Gallian Panzers'.**
- » ***Skies Of Arcadia*'s Vyse and Aika cameo as Squad 7 soldiers, while Fina serves as the team medic.**



» [PS3] The unique art style gives the game a timeless appearance, despite being an early PS3 release.

39.

VALKYRIA CHRONICLES

Deftly combining artistry with the art of war, Sega's cult RPG hit dazzled the critics and marked the glorious beginning of a superb turn-based strategy franchise…

THE BACKGROUND

When talking about Sega's contributions to the RPG and strategy genres, *Skies Of Arcadia* and *Sakura Wars* are two titles that are bound to enter the conversation – the former's cult following remains strong to this day, while the latter was a multi-million selling phenomenon in Japan. When members of the teams behind those games got together, they decided to draw upon their previous work to create something new. The result was *Valkyria Chronicles*.

Wishing to tell a war story inspired by World War Two while including some fantasy elements, the team employed Raita Honjou to come up with character and vehicle designs. To fit with the preferred rustic aesthetic, Honjou opted to include design elements that recalled World War One, particularly in the uniforms of the soldiers. With the intention that the game should appeal to players who wouldn't normally enjoy war-themed videogames, *Valkyria Chronicles* was designed to place focus on the characters rather than the violent reality of military conflict. Originally conceived as a much more traditional strategy game, real-time action elements were added to a battle system inspired by *Sakura Wars 3* to provide a sense of emotional involvement, dramatically altering the game's overall dynamics.

THE GAME

Valkyria Chronicles is set in the fictional country of Gallia, during the Second Europan War. Gallia is neutral in the conflict, but its supply of resources causes it to be invaded by the Empire. Taking charge of Squad 7 of the Gallian Militia, a ragtag brigade of characters with their own distinct personalities, your goal is to drive back the Imperials and ensure the freedom of your homeland.

The most immediately striking aspect of *Valkyria Chronicles* is its unique visual style, which goes beyond the usual cel-shading technique to produce visuals that resemble watercolour paintings. The technical achievement is impressive – as the map zooms out

Things of note











Spin-off city

Valkyria Chronicles has become a successful media franchise in Japan, inspiring a TV anime, multiple manga releases and two PSP sequels, as well as an online trading card game.

Darcsen prejudice

Acts of racism during war are recognised in-game. The Darcsen people are vilified, stripped of their surnames, and even subjected to purges and slavery.

Information overload

The game features information on the background of every character, as well as Gallian and Imperial weaponry, military policy and even the history of Gallia and its surrounding nations.

Cheesy fan service

Extra missions can be bought from the reporter stationed with Squad 7. These include a holiday chapter featuring a swimsuit scene – a tradition which has carried across to both sequels.

Someone else's shoes

A DLC pack entitled *Behind Her Blue Flame* enables you to play as an Imperial squad under the command of Selvaria Bles, one of the game's primary antagonists.



» [PS3] The onomatopoeic accompaniment to each attack heightens the game's comic book feel.



» [PS3] The tactical map is an invaluable tool, showing unit types and placement at a glance to allow for planning.



» [PS3] *Valkyria Chronicles* features varied battlefields, taking in everything from city streets to massive deserts.

What the press thought

IGN
Score: 9/10
"This is simply an outstanding game where both the story and gameplay come together to form an incredibly rewarding experience."



games™
Score: 9/10
"The new perspective works well, injecting some much-needed action into the genre without sacrificing tactical choice. In fact, the switch actually creates more choices if anything."

or objects leave the painted area in the centre of the screen, detail is removed until only simple pencil outlines remain. It's a perfect fit for the game's take on 20th Century warfare, calling to mind the work of the acclaimed Japanese animation team Studio Ghibli.

But all the visual flair would be worthless if the gameplay didn't hold up its end of the bargain, and the game doesn't disappoint here. *Valkyria Chronicles* plays out through a series of tactical battles, utilising a combination of turn-based and real-time gameplay. Before battle you'll have to choose squad members, who are divided into five classes, ranging from close-range shocktroopers and long-range snipers to the heavily armoured anti-tank lancers. Getting the right mix is crucial due to the game's varied terrain and mission objectives – snipers prove their worth in open desert maps, but prove far less useful in dense forests.



» [PS3] There's no time for dithering once you've selected a unit to move – you'll immediately face enemy fire.

When battle begins, players are presented with an overhead tactical map where they can select individual units. This places the camera into a third-person view of your chosen soldier, who can be moved in real-time until their Action Points run out as well as fire once. Complicating matters, while you're in control of a character the enemy is at liberty to open fire on them. This active element of play provides for some wonderfully tense moments as you decide just how far to charge in before letting loose with your own weapon, balancing the risk of further damage with the possibility of a better aim. It's also important to consider positioning as you relinquish control, as your soldiers will fire during the enemy's turn.

Paying attention to your characters makes a difference on the battlefield too, as their individual traits have been worked into the battle system. Take Jann Walker as an example. Being around men enhances his accuracy as he tries to impress them and if he's around his crush Largo, his attack strength will be increased. He's also got hayfever, which causes him to lose HP around plant life. If one of your soldiers falls in battle, you'll have three turns to rescue them before they die. You'll want to avoid this at all costs – while dead squad members can be replaced, you won't be able to imagine your squad without your favourite characters.

WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

In an era where the skills of Japanese developers have been called into question on an unprecedented level, *Valkyria Chronicles* stands out as a fantastic game which couldn't have originated anywhere else. With its charming artistic style and anime sensibilities, as well as character designs that provide a lesson in imbuing a large cast with a distinct individuality, the game is able to engage players outside of the usual strategy audience.

Despite combining influences from the developer's previous games, there's still nothing quite like *Valkyria Chronicles*' unique take on turn-based strategy. Marrying an excellent game system with well-designed and varied maps, the game provides epic battles on a grand scale, made all the more memorable by your soldiers and the control you have over them. ✱

In the chair with...

PETE COOKE



From humble origins as a maths teacher, he became responsible for some of the most astounding, not to mention playable, games of the 8-bit era. After years of searching, Retro Gamer has finally tracked down the elusive Mr Cooke...

THE LEICESTER TOURISM BOARD'S WEBSITE LISTS AN IMPRESSIVE SELECTION OF FAMOUS NAMES ASSOCIATED WITH THE AREA. ESTEEMED LUVVIES SUCH AS SIR RICHARD ATTENBOROUGH AND MICHAEL KITCHEN RUB SHOULDERS WITH MUSICIANS JOHN DEACON OF QUEEN AND ROCK BAND KASABIAN. FOOTBALL IS ALSO WELL REPRESENTED WITH LEGENDS SUCH AS GARY LINEKER OBE, PETER SHILTON OBE, AND, OF COURSE, EMILE HESKEY, ACTUALLY BORN IN LEICESTER ITSELF. BUT ONE NAME NOT ON THE LIST THAT PERHAPS HAS EVEN MORE VALUE TO THE READERS OF **RETRO GAMER** IS PETE COOKE, THE GENIUS BEHIND SEVERAL ICONIC 8-BIT GAMES FROM THE EIGHTIES. ON A TYPICALLY WARM SEPTEMBER AFTERNOON WE TRAVELLED UP TO THE MIDLANDS CITY HAVING FINALLY SECURED THE OPPORTUNITY TO CHAT WITH – IN OUR OPINION – ITS MOST FAMOUS OCCUPANT...

SELECTED TIMELINE

- **INVINCIBLE ISLAND** [ZX SPECTRUM] 1983
- **THE INFERNO** [ZX SPECTRUM] 1984
- **URBAN UPSTART** [ZX SPECTRUM] 1984
- **UDG GENERATOR** [ZX SPECTRUM] 1984
- **MAZE CHASE** [ZX SPECTRUM] 1984
- **UPPER GUMTREE** [C64] 1985
- **SKI STAR 2000** [ZX SPECTRUM] 1985
- **JUGGERNAUT** [ZX SPECTRUM] 1985
- **TAU CETI** [VARIOUS] 1985
- **ROOM 10** [VARIOUS] 1986
- **ACADEMY** [ZX SPECTRUM] 1987
- **MICRONAUT ONE** [ZX SPECTRUM] 1987
- **BRAINSTORM** [ZX SPECTRUM] 1987
- **EARTHLIGHT** [ZX SPECTRUM] 1988
- **A WHOLE NEW BALL GAME** [SPECTRUM] 1989
- **STUNT CAR RACER** [ZX SPECTRUM] 1989
- **GRANNY'S GARDEN** [VARIOUS] 1989
- **TOWER OF BABEL** [ATARI ST] 1990
- **GRAND PRIX** [PC] 1992
- **GRAND PRIX 2** [PC] 1996
- **GRAND PRIX 3** [PC] 2000
- **ZENFIT** [iOS] 2012
- **EVERYTHING MUST GO** [iOS] 2013

So finally we have Pete Cooke In The Chair!
[Laughs] I haven't been hiding, I just find it strange that people have an interest in things I did over 30 years ago!

So you moved to Leicester when you were a young man?
Yep. I went to university here and did a maths degree. After graduation I tried to make a living playing in a progressive rock band. But then punk came along and that was the end of that. So I did a post-graduate degree and got a job teaching maths to 11 to 14-year-olds.

We're guessing your involvement in computers and programming began then.
It was only a small department and I was there when the government said it needed to get computers into schools. I think it was around 1980 they sent us an RM 380Z [an early 8-bit microcomputer from Oxford-based Research Machines] which was a huge brick of a thing, text only and something like 1K of memory. The head took one look at it and gave it to the maths department and I volunteered to explore it further. No-one knew about computers; I'd seen one at university when we visited the computer department once. It was a huge mainframe with lots of men in white coats looking after it. But the RM – to be honest, it was very weird and a bit complicated.

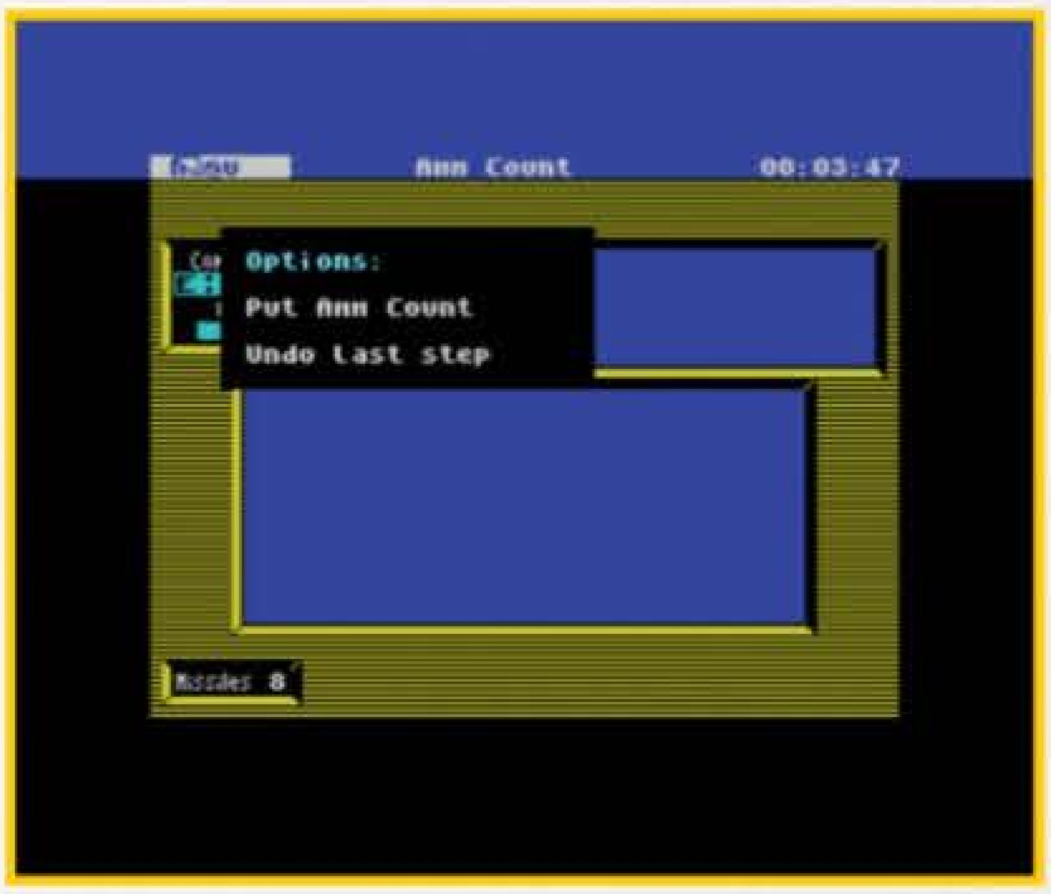
Home computers were in their infancy – you must have soon acquired one?
When Sinclair released the ZX81 I sort of lunged at it [laughs] and bought one as soon as I could. I remember it arrived on a Friday and my partner was away that weekend; when she returned on the Sunday evening I hadn't slept one wink! It all made sense now: you could give the computer commands and it would do stuff, work out logarithms and formulas that would take a mathematician a lifetime.

Did you begin to make your own programs?
I pottered around making character-based graphics, got to grips with BASIC and just carried on when the Spectrum came out. I set up a computer club at the school and took in programs that I had written. Eventually I wrote a simple text adventure and showed it to some of the students who said it was seriously good and thought it was better than some of the stuff in the shops!

Why an adventure game?
They were interesting, and it was the idea you could explore somewhere. Also, I didn't have the skills then to design 3D or animated graphics, although I'd been reading about AI and language parsing. It could also [have] been the influence of games such as *The Hobbit*, or maybe just the freedom appealed to me. I wrote it from scratch with bits in BASIC and tiny bits in assembler, but essentially hand-coded. The kids said I should try and get it published and I told them they must be joking; I was only doing it for a laugh and to see what I could do. But I sent it off.

***Invincible Island* was published by Richard Shepherd Software – why that company?**
Maybe they had been publishing something similar... I can't honestly remember why; I just sent it to them. Then one day they rang me up and told me they'd like to buy it for £1,000! I was only earning £500 a month teaching, and they were

» [Spectrum] The initial USP of *Academy* – being able to design your Gal-Corp Skimmer's cockpit.





» [Spectrum] Pete coded *Jet Set Gertie* alongside his student, Russell Rawlinson.

offering me two months' wages for something I was doing as a hobby. It sold okay, and that was the start of it all…

Of course *Urban Upstart* was your most famous adventure game with an unusual setting.

I just thought there's no point doing a fantasy setting like everyone else was. It did quite well, I made some money. Richard Shepherd encouraged me to do another adventure, which I did. But I eventually became restless with the format. *Upper Gumtree*, the sequel to *Urban*, was my last text adventure. I suppose I'd done it, knew how to do them and wanted to move on. Just sticking an image on the screen and some text was fine, but the machines were getting more powerful and I wanted to start animating stuff. I was quite fascinated by 3D and, being a mathematician, was intrigued by all the perspective transformations and matrices behind it all. I needed a new challenge.

Which brings us to your final game for Richard Shepherd Software: *Ski Star 2000*.

Yeah… I was thinking about doing something in 3D. I knew it needed to be very calculated and I'd worked out the maths involved and the algorithms for the lines, but it could only be minimal with the limit of the technology *and* having it move at a decent lick. Complicated environments were out, so I came up with the idea of a skiing simulation of some kind, as this was a much simpler environment. *Ski Star* was my first game written wholly in assembler and I was very pleased with it, but unfortunately Richard Shepherd went under shortly after it was released.

We notice around this time you were also credited with a couple of programs from the *Horizons* tape which was bundled with the ZX Spectrum 48K+ model.

Oh yes [laughs], that was weird! I was approached by Dorling Kindersley and I knew nothing about the tape, just that they wanted a couple of utilities. I already had the UDG generator utility and I wrote *Maze Chase* as well. The strange thing was, I got it all working and sent it to them and they said they wanted it to work with the shift *and* the cursor keys. I thought it was madness, but it was only when the new version came out and these programs were bundled with it that I realised the keyboard was different. I was gobsmacked when I saw those two little things on the *Horizons* tape.



"When Sinclair released the ZX81 I sort of lunged at it"

» Pete is still working in the industry today, mainly designing iOS games like *Zenfit*.



Your first major game and a huge step up was just around the corner. Tell us more on how you got the idea for *Juggernaut*.
I had a mate who was keen on becoming a truck driver, but he came back from trying to learn and said he couldn't do it; he said it was fine until you came to reversing. So I thought about this mathematically and wrote a little program to simulate the way you turn one way and the trailer goes the other. And although reversing wasn't a big part of the final game, that was the idea, that little model, that inspired *Juggernaut*. I wanted the articulation and real physics and once I had that it was just a question of putting a game to it. So what do lorries do? They deliver stuff. I called it *Jackknife* with the original concept in my mind. CRL renamed it.

Why did you choose CRL?
I have no idea… I may have been approached by Ian Ellery [CRL's software manager]. I don't know.

You were still working freelance, how did the deals work financially?
For my first game, *Invincible Island*, Richard Shepherd simply bought the game outright. But for everything after that, I insisted on royalties. I didn't need an up-front payment – I funded the development, although *Juggernaut* wasn't a great seller as I think it was a bit of an oddity. As soon as I'd finished it, I was busy working on my next idea, which was to be some kind of space adventure.

This would be possibly your most famous game: *Tau Ceti*.
I had seen a game called *Gyron* by Firebird and wondered how on Earth they'd got these huge shapes to zoom and move around. Obviously they couldn't use pre-mapped graphics as there wasn't enough memory for all the frames, so they must have been generated using width tables. So I thought if you did it fractionally, you could have a shadow on it and that was the start of *Tau Ceti*. I got that working and it looked brilliant. The way the shading worked meant the light had to be low, but I realised it was a natural fit for a space game, something based on planetary surfaces like the Moon. Then there were a lot of other influences such as *Elite* and *Star Trek*.

Where did the name come from?
My mum and I were keen on astronomy. I went and looked at what G-type stars are nearby and I noticed one that had a nice name. I built the game from pre-mapped cities, the player jumping from one to another, with the plot drawing a lot from my love of classic science fiction novels, particularly Larry Niven and Isaac Asimov.

How did it all fit into 48K?
With a lot of jiggery-pokery! I would use tricks such as generating data from a random seed, so when you zoom in on a city it expands the data from some compressed form. And of course the view screen was small because the more data you copy across every frame, the longer it takes and the slower the game gets.

NUMBER CRUNCHING

£1,000 paid by Richard Shepherd Software to Pete for his first game, Invincible Island

16 The number of circuits in Grand Prix 2

12 Lightyears, the distance from G-class star Tau Ceti to our Solar System

76.08 the average score of Pete's games reviewed in Crash magazine, including…

5 Crash Smashes, a top score of 94 per cent (Tau Ceti) and a lowest score of 14 per cent (Zolyx)

2164 The year the first post-accident expedition is sent to Tau Ceti

935 the impressive score given to Tower Of Babel by ACE Magazine in 1990

90+ graphic locations in Urban Upstart, most of them interminably grim

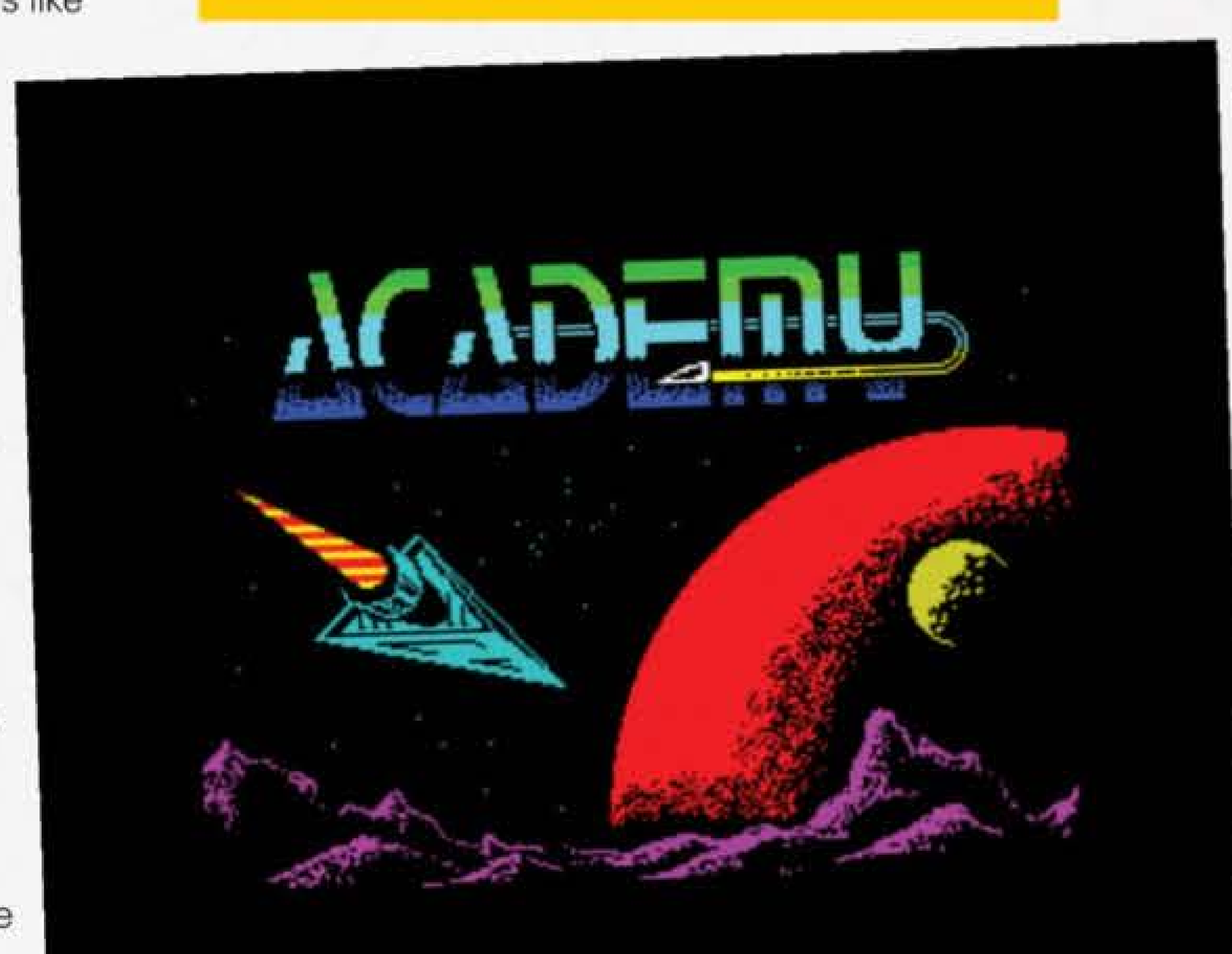


» [Spectrum] Infrared view in *Academy* enabled you to pick out objects and enemies at night.

Your efforts were not in vain. *Tau Ceti* was a smash. A *Crash* Smash, even.
I have vivid memory of driving up to Ludlow with a pre-release version of *Tau Ceti* – they were lovely guys. And as for the review, I was dead chuffed, but I knew it was going to be good. I was still teaching, and the kids said it was fantastic, a reaction I'd never had before. So I knew even at an early stage that this was worth taking time over and getting absolutely right. I thought if this doesn't succeed, that's me done!

You were still freelance – was *Tau Ceti* all your own work?
Ian Ellery did some of the static graphics and the loading screen. Everything else including the sound, was me – it took me about six months to do.

Do you remember the strange triangular box for the game?
It was a very clever idea, and I took it as a sign CRL were investing heavily in the game by trying to do something different. But the boxes were flimsy.

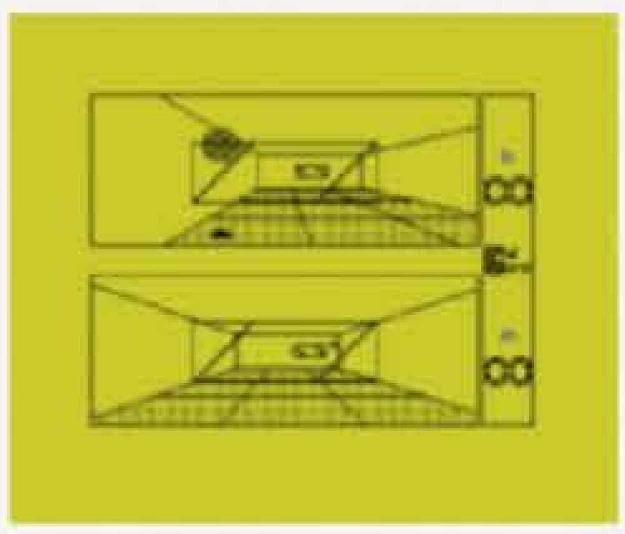


***Tau Ceti* was a huge hit critically and commercially. How did your life change after its release?**
It didn't really… although they [CRL] took me out for a Chinese meal in London to celebrate [laughs]. But despite [that it was] never going to make me a millionaire due to the limitations of the market, I did very well out of it. And of course CRL were soon pressuring me for a sequel which I didn't want to do unless I could improve the concept in some way. So I did *Room 10*.

Ah, *Room 10*. Ping Pong in a box.
[Laughs] I liked the idea because it was in 3D and it was different. I wrote it very quickly as it's a simple game and gave it to CRL. I wanted them to release it as a budget game because it was so simple, but they put it out at full-price. It got less than glowing reviews.




» [Amstrad] There are plenty of tricky missions to complete in *Academy*.


» [Amstrad] Room 10 – "It should have been a budget game" – Pete Cooke.



> "I got the idea from a Commodore 64 program called The Pinball Designer" Pete on the inspiration for Academy's Skimmer design feature

And CRL wanted a Special Edition of *Tau Ceti* as well…
The 128K Spectrum had come out and they wanted me to beef it up with the bigger memory capacity.

What did you add?
I can't for the life of me remember!

You were hoping we wouldn't ask, weren't you?
Yes! Actually, there was some stuff, like an encyclopedia with lots of extra information and I think I improved the graphics and sound. I remember working quite hard on it!

By now the pressure for a sequel to *Tau Ceti* must have been colossal.
It was, and I came up with the 'academy', formed to train skimmer pilots. This meant I could have a variety of missions and make the game more interesting.

And famously, *Academy* had an option to design your own skimmer.
I was dead chuffed with that. I got the idea from a C64 program called *The Pinball Designer*, which I hadn't played, but read about. I thought that was a good idea, to give players the flexibility to design your own layout. It was challenging, but fun and once I'd sussed out how to do it, it just took time. That's what I'm like: unless it was interesting to me on a technical level, I wouldn't do it, and I was keen to do things that no-one had tried before. One of my biggest bugbears in games was when kids would say they got stuck on a certain level and would give up and not see the rest of the game. I wanted players to be able to play the whole game, which was why you could complete the missions in *Academy* in almost any order.

***Academy* was another success. Presumably CRL wanted a third game?**
Yes, but I was a stubborn bugger and wouldn't do it. If I could have thought of something different then maybe… but already there had been criticism that *Academy* was graphically too similar to *Tau Ceti*. I'd tried things like rotating the shadows but I couldn't do it fast enough.

Talking of CRL, it had its own development studio. Were you asked to join it?
I don't remember it, but I'd have said no. I liked the independence of working freelance and the fun of it for me was that I could do whatever I liked. If I'd worked there they'd be telling me what to code all the time and it would have become just a job.

After *Academy* you ended your relationship with CRL. What happened?
I dealt mainly with Ian and he decided to leave CRL. I can only speculate that he was unhappy in some ▶



» [Spectrum] A change of view and another playable game: *Earthlight*.

YOU ASK THE QUESTIONS

We thought it was only fair that we should let some of Retro Gamer's readers quiz the venerable Mr Cooke…head over to the Retro Gamer forum to have your say www.retrogamer.net/forum

PARANOID MARVIN: Why did you change from making adventure games to action?

I'd coded four adventure games, three on the Spectrum and one on the Commodore 64 and was running out of interesting ideas for plots. Plus, as I had learnt more Z80 assembly language and as the development tools improved for the Spectrum, it became possible to write code mostly in Assembler and produce interesting action-based games. So I gravitated towards that.

PAULEMOZ: How difficult was the shading system in *Tau Ceti* to implement and how long did it take to get right?

Once I'd got the idea it wasn't too difficult. I started with a mocked-up version in BASIC and the tricky bit was the math. The only way to get it working fast enough was to use lookup tables for tangents and inverse tangents, but that was standard back then. I do remember trying to include more than one colour using attributes but it spoiled the smoothness of the effect and I abandoned it.

HALCYONDAZE00: Was *Urban Upstart*'s Scarthorpe based on anywhere, Liverpool perhaps?

[Laughs] I'd been to Liverpool once when I was a kid as I was a big Everton fan and my parents took me to see them play in the days of Alan Ball and Joe Royle. I remember my Dad parking the car in the street and a group of kids calling out 'Mind your car mister?'. It took me a few minutes to realise what they really meant and I thought 'This is a bit of a tougher place than Kettering!' I suppose Scarthorpe was a mixture of that experience and the comic idea of a grim northern mining town.



In the chair with...

way with life there, and one day he just said to me that he was leaving and would I come and work with him at his new company. I hadn't heard of Nexus but agreed.

Micronaut One was your only game for Nexus. Was there another technical idea behind the game's conception?

Yep – I wanted to do something tunnel-based and I knew how I could get it to work fast. One of the problems with doing 3D is that objects obscure other objects, so you would use a paint algorithm so that the last thing you draw is on top of everything. These days you would use hardware and Z-buffering, but on the Spectrum it was incredibly processor-intensive if you had a long tunnel and were drawing a lot of stuff that doesn't actually get seen. But I worked out a way – which I don't think anyone else had at the time – where you could get the tunnels screamingly fast. If the tunnels were rectangular, you almost had a clip area and if you worked from the front to the back you're clipping objects against the bits you can see the then you don't have to draw behind the front object. Along with this and other ideas such as splitting the tunnels by doing one then the other recursively, I got the code working quickly and it looked really nice. Then I thought, how am I going to get a game into this?

[Retro Gamer's head is spinning with all this coding genius. Pete notices our glazed look and chuckles]

It was always about seeing what I could achieve first. So I had a game involving tunnels, a maze of tunnels and the notion that I wanted it dynamic and fast-moving. I can't remember where the idea for the game came from, but the concept of the eggs and the Scrim growing was because it meant things changed and there was a real sense of the game progressing.

Micronaut One was another critical success but not a great seller.

I wondered if it was because of Nexus being a small company compared to CRL. Also I think the Spectrum market was beginning to peak by then and the focus was shifting to the 16-bit computers. Being clever on an 8-bit wasn't interesting any more – the new computers could do proper 3D and in full colour. The times were changing.



» [PC] *Grand Prix 2* was the first *GP* game Pete worked full-time on.



» [PC] The presentation in *Grand Prix 2* was second to none.

"Being clever on an 8-bit wasn't interesting any more"

Did you regret moving from CRL?

I did wonder, because Nexus disappeared shortly after *Micronaut One*, just like Richard Shepherd had back in 1985. In fact if you look back, every publisher I worked for went bust [laughs]. I guess that's how it was.

You had already started working on another space shooter.

I was exploring 3D again, trying to get the Spectrum to do something interesting without involving too much maths. Sprites were a nightmare but I wanted to try a shoot-'em-up from a different angle. The scrolling platform with shadows was the original idea and *Earthlight* developed from there. It was a simple game, but technically very interesting. I looked around for a publisher and was naturally nervous as I didn't want to pick another company that could go under so I reasoned that a big company like Firebird would be a safe choice. As a freelancer, the worry was if the publisher went bust just as you're finishing the game and I thought that was less likely to happen with Firebird.

After Firebird was bought out by Microprose you coded your first 16-bit game, _Tower Of Babel_.

I did, but before that I worked with Geoff Crammond for the first time, converting *Stunt Car Racer* onto the Spectrum. That was exciting to work on and certainly challenging, and I also did a NES version that was never released. Around the same time I wrote a little Spectrum puzzle game called *A Whole New Ball Game*, but I was determined not to fall into the same trap that I did with *Room 10* and gave the game away [to *Crash* Magazine]. But *Tower Of Babel* – that was the last game I coded freelance like that. Again, it was based on shadows and had a 3D environment with a semi-rotational view. I think it was the best game I wrote, but it sold very poorly.

The next few years you worked solely with Geoff Crammond on his acclaimed series of Formula One games. How did this begin?

Geoff had a contract with Microprose and was working on the first game. They needed someone to write the menu system which I jumped at. We did an Amiga, Atari ST and PC version but it was a different business from the Eighties; suddenly it was really big.

After the success of _Grand Prix_, as with _Tau Ceti_, a sequel was inevitable…

I was starting to get nervous about working freelance. I had a family now and wanted something more permanent. So Geoff sub-contracted me to work on *Grand Prix 2* – but it was tough. We'd get rung up daily for an update and were told there were millions of boxes waiting for the game in a warehouse somewhere. There were just two of us doing the bulk of the programming with Geoff's brothers-in-law helping with track design and testing. Then it came near the end and we were running late and worried we might get into trouble with the publisher. Geoff – who was a perfectionist and extremely dedicated – invited me to live with him and his family while we finished off the game, which took three months. Geoff and his family were fantastic and really made me feel at home, but God it was tough: we'd basically work all day, have a meal then go back to work until we were too tired to work anymore. The only breaks we'd have were to watch Formula One races and that was only because we could call that research!

Of course, _Grand Prix 2_ was another huge success and a third game was soon on the cards.

Yes, although a lot more people were involved from the publisher's side this time. Geoff was thinking about doing another *Stunt Car Racer*, but the pressure to do *GP3* was too immense. Then towards the end of the development of the game, I remember



» [Atari ST] Pete is proudest of this attractive puzzle game for the Atari ST computer.

FIVE TO PLAY

Get a crash course in Pete's games by playing all of the following gems



TAU CETI

■ Inspired technically by the elegant beauty of Firebird's *Gyron* and the same company's complex space adventure *Elite*; infused with an intriguing story of rogue computer systems and a mass of planets to explore – there was no doubting *Tau Ceti*'s ambition.

The plot was encouraged by Pete Cooke's love of classic sci-fi, telling a tale of humanity spreading amongst the stars by the year 2150, only to fall foul of a mysterious plague. Despite a complex sheen, *Tau Ceti* was essentially a shoot-'em-up with bells and whistles – but an extremely graceful, accomplished, playable and addictive one at that.



ACADEMY

■ Despite utilising a virtually identical graphics engine, Pete introduced enough fresh elements for *Tau Ceti*'s sequel to become another critical and commercial hit. Buoyed by the groundbreaking concept of the player being able to design their own cockpit and skimmer, he devised a story that enabled him to introduce an optional mission-style gameplay with the player able to choose from a set of missions to play. Essentially a training simulation school for Gal-Corp Skimmer pilots whose stock had risen considerably since one of their number saved the Tau Ceti III colony in the original game.



URBAN UPSTART

■ Appreciating the freedom of movement and story-based gameplay of text adventures, Pete Cooke's early games were mostly of this genre. After the treasure-hunting hijinks of *Invincible Island* came *Urban Upstart* and a novel plot that involved escaping from the urban hell known as Scarthorpe – 'Where even the dogs carry flick-knives' noted the cassette inlay mischievously. Keen to develop an adventure with an alternate backdrop to the ubiquitous fantasy or sci-fi settings, Pete devised the town drawing inspiration from a number of different locations. In addition, the game had a sharp sense of humour.



MICRONAUT ONE

■ After several successful years producing hit games for London's CRL, Pete followed his close contact and CRL's software development manager Ian Ellery across to relative newcomer Nexus. While that didn't prove to be the wisest move, with Nexus soon folding with considerable reported debts, the sole game that Pete coded for it again demonstrated his amazing ability to get impressive graphics moving, and moving fast, on the ZX Spectrum. Again born from a technical idea (the challenge of setting a game within a labyrinthine set of tunnels), *Micronaut One* was a superb game.



GRAND PRIX 2

■ After contributing the menu system and a small number of other elements to the original game, Pete joined the *Grand Prix* team full-time for its inevitable sequel with he and Geoff Crammond the sole coders for the follow-up. The game took three years to produce and as a result simulated the 1994 Formula One season, featuring all the teams and drivers from the era, 16 circuits and a multitude of options, including the ability to utilise a variety of driving aids for the more action-orientated racing fan. With Geoff and Pete realising the PC was a natural home for their complex simulation they concentrated on this version.

us visiting a trade show and seeing an American company called Papyrus who did a series of indie car games. They had 85 people working for them, and there was Geoff and I still programming in a two-man team. We did consider setting up a development studio, but in the end decided against it and I thought it was a good time to quit. I helped out a little with the transfer of some of the tools and the menu system for *GP4* but that was it.

Had you had enough of coding at that point in your career?

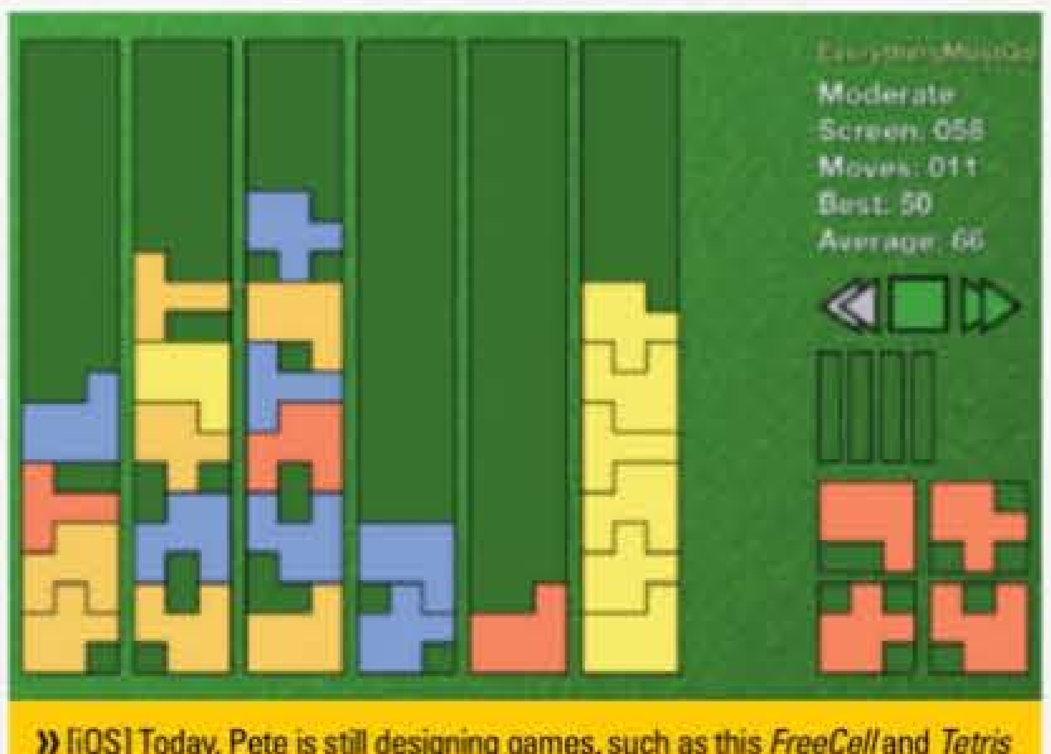
I missed the social side of work with programming as it was a lonely job. I had been teaching GCSE maths part-time at an adult education college for ten years, and had found myself looking forward more to that than the programming. It wasn't particularly challenging work but it was good fun and nice to help people. Eventually that led to me working at Leicester College in the Computer Sciences department.

Did they know about your background?

They do now! When I first went there was one guy who knew who I was and he was kind of freaked out. Every year, one of the kids Googles my name and finds out.

The Eighties was a turbulent but exciting time to be involved in videogames. How would you look back to your time then?

Nowadays I work with kids who are desperate to work with computers and games but it's very difficult to get into now. It's a mature industry and all about experience and qualifications. Back then you could literally make something up and show it to people and it would get published. There's a bit of that back today with mobile gaming, but even there the bar is raised with major publishers doing stuff that no-one else can. I think I was enormously lucky to be around at the right time.



» [iOS] Today, Pete is still designing games, such as this *FreeCell* and *Tetris* iOS mash-up, *Everything Must Go*.

Could you have envisaged this after being handed that strange rectangular computer back in the early Eighties?

[Laughs] No… but I was very passionate about computers and still am. I think they're fantastic and the way they have changed the world is unimaginable. People today often take them for granted, but when you're older you have more perspective. I mean, take the internet. I remember Geoff and I using a 1440 modem to pump code down phone lines back in the early Nineties and it would take half an hour to send 500K. I look back and think, how could I not see the potential then? But no-one could.

Tell us which of your games you are most proud of and why?

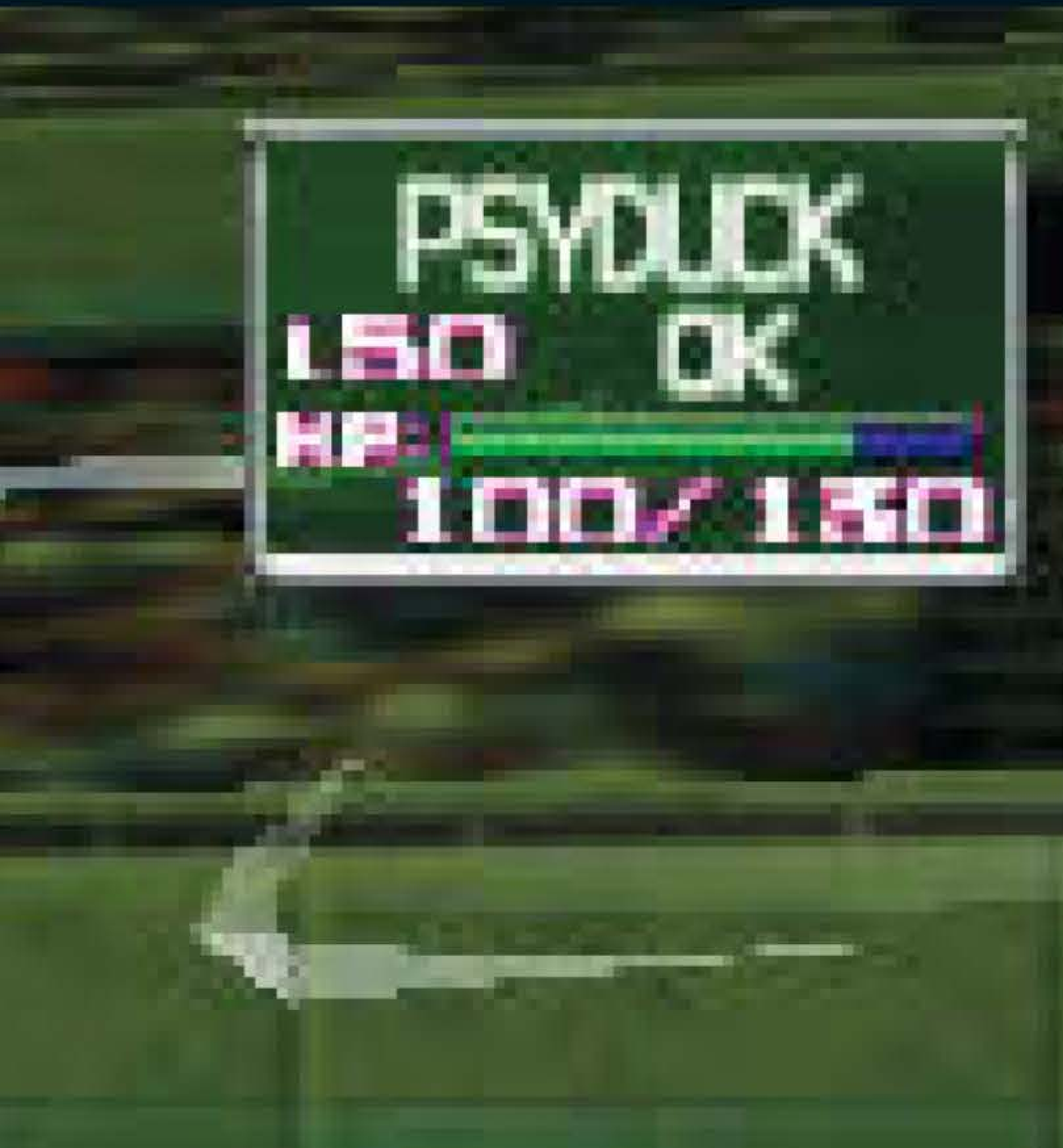
I really like *Tower Of Babel* – I think it's the best game I did. The most successful was *Tau Ceti* I suppose, and the shading idea was great, I'm very proud of that. And *Zenfit* [Pete's recent iOS game], which I discovered by accident by exploring stuff with grids, shapes and matching colours, and then realising actually there could be hidden depth and strategies to even such a simple game.

So any future games in the works, either original or remakes?

I've got more plans for iOS games, but probably not remakes. The interesting thing for me at the time was the technical challenge with the limitations of the platform and obviously that's not there now to a large extent. It's all for fun, which is why I do mainly puzzle games, which I love. It's funny, back in the early Eighties I'd potter around and show these games to the computer club. Now I take them to the college and see what the Level Three students think. Despite the dramatic changes in technology, some things never change.

Many thanks to Pete for his time.


BULBASAUR
L50 OK
HP:
55/ 125









Pokémon Stadium

WANTING TO BE THE VERY BEST

» RETROREVIVAL



» Nintendo 64
» Nintendo
» 2000

When *Pokémon* reached the UK, I was only 13 years old – a young lad in prime position to be swept up by the craze. The fantastic Game Boy RPG quickly hooked me, but hardware issues sometimes made it hard to enjoy the trading and battling that were key to the game design. The Game Boy's link cable port had been changed with the introduction of the Game Boy Pocket, but *Pokémon*'s success meant that a lot of old hardware had been brought out of retirement.

Pokémon Stadium went some way towards resolving this. The Transfer Pak, a peripheral designed specifically for the game, allowed players to take their teams straight from the Game Boy cartridge to battle each other in glorious 3D. The need to own an N64 might have seemed like a hefty requirement, but the popularity of *Pokémon* meant that it was easy to find ways around it.

The local Virgin Megastore had an N64 demo pod running the game. A short walk away, Burger King was running the game as part of a promotional tie-in. In those venues and any others I could find, I set out to beat every opponent I faced. Where others sought glory through sports, I had *Pokémon*. Having played the Game Boy game obsessively, my team was pretty good and I rarely had much trouble. But my unbeaten run couldn't last forever, and eventually a slightly older kid subjected me to defeat. The lack of cheering crowds alerted me to the fact that my quest for glory was perhaps misguided. *

RETRORATED



>> Retro Studios is back with a new take on Donkey Kong Country, but is it as fun as its Wii predecessor? We also take a look at the next-gen version of Tomb Raider and Capcom's reboot of Strider



» [Wii U] The bosses in *Tropical Freeze* are extremely inventive, but the battles do tend to drag due to their length.



Donkey Kong Country: Tropical Freeze

DONKEY DONKEY PANIC

INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** WII U
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £39.99
- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **DEVELOPER:** RETRO STUDIOS
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

BRIEF HISTORY

» Donkey Kong has been having videogame escapades since 1981's *Donkey Kong*. Initially a villain, he soon became the star of his own games and came to particular prominence with the release of Rare's *Donkey Kong Country*. Two SNES sequels followed, along with handheld games, until Retro Studios was handed the licence in 2010.



You have to hand it to Retro Studios. After impressing the naysayers with its largely excellent *Metroid Prime* series, it breathed the same fresh life into the *Donkey Kong Country* franchise. Nintendo was obviously pleased too – it shifted nearly 5 million units worldwide, without taking the 3DS remake into account – and has had the developer hard at work on a sequel.

Kensuke Tanabe, the director behind *Super Mario Bros 2*, has once again been involved with the project, but here his influence feels more obvious than before. This is most noticeable in one of the new abilities that *Donkey Kong* and his friends now possess. It's now possible to stun certain enemies, pick them up and lob that at unsuspecting foes. Objects in the ground can also be pulled up, revealing hidden items or altering the level that the Kongs are currently exploring, while there's even a new smart-bomb effect created by having two Kongs high-five each other. It's a shame that one of the most significant additions to the gameplay has been plucked from a 26-year-old game, but it works well enough all the same and does become very useful during certain boss battles later on.

The other major addition to *Donkey Kong Country*'s core gameplay is the addition of two new playable Kongs: Cranky and Dixie. Dixie can give Donkey Kong a temporary lift with her long hair, while Kranky uses his cane *DuckTales*-style to bounce on enemies and dangerous objects. Cranky can also hit enemies with his cane, which is particularly useful in *Tropical Freeze*'s many underwater areas. The addition of the new Kongs is a welcome touch, adding a bit of variety – particularly in multiplayer – but they still feel a little underdeveloped.

And that's one of *Tropical Freeze*'s biggest issues. Like Retro's second *Metroid Prime* game and Nintendo's *New Super Mario Bros 2*, it feels like too much of a retread – as if Retro is simply going through the motions, ticking off a list of

» [Wii U] The flying sections feel even more difficult and remain a great cause of frustration.



★ PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN
Strider
It was never going to be as good as the arcade original, but neither are my kids. A solid update of a cult classic.



NICK
Donkey Kong Country: Tropical Freeze
It's certainly hard, but there's just enough variety in Retro's sequel to keep me happy.



features that every polished platformer needs. And, in fairness, *Tropical Freeze* is a very polished game.

The controls throughout *Tropical Freeze* are largely great, with the Pro Controller being our peripheral of choice. Retro has wisely dumped the motion controls of the original game, allowing for far more responsive platforming, which is handy, because this is a far tougher game than its Wii counterpart. Double jumps, particularly during the numerous mine-cart sections, still feel a little hard to pull off, but the controls for the most part work well with even the GamePad performing admirably.

Graphically, *Tropical Freeze* is superb, with sumptuous visuals that really bring its tropical locations to life. Donkey Kong himself looks incredible with wonderfully realistic fur, while the environments he gallops through are filled with impressive detail. One stage takes place in the eye of a tornado, while others are set entirely underwater, something sorely missing from the previous game. It's an aesthetic showcase for Nintendo's console and is arguably one of the best-looking games on the machine. The graphical glory is further enhanced by some exceedingly catchy tunes that perfectly capture the on-screen antics of the mischievous simians.

For all its aesthetic splendour there are issues with *Tropical Freeze*, with the biggest being its difficulty level. There's nothing wrong with challenging games, but certain levels feel brutally unfair at times, seeing you lose many lives. There's no Super Kong this time around either, making Retro's sequel a painfully tough experience to get through in places. This is particularly noticeable in *Tropical Freeze*'s numerous boss encounters. There's no doubting their creativity – a cavorting sea lion here, a well-equipped owl there – but they can be a right bugger to defeat. It's not always clear how a boss can be beaten, and many battles have numerous layers to them, with defeat sending you right back to the start. This is also true of the mine-cart levels and stages where you potter along on the back of a flying barrel. They were tough in *Donkey Kong Country Returns*, and remain the wrong side of frustrating here.

And yet there's a lot of things *Tropical Freeze* does get right, and for all its hard difficulty spikes and tricky stages, the sheer amount of items tucked away in each stage will reignite those halcyon days of searching every last section of a level that the best 16-bit platformers had. As with *Super Mario 3D World*, there's a lot more to *Tropical Freeze* than first meets the eye, meaning there's plenty to do once you've finished the main game.

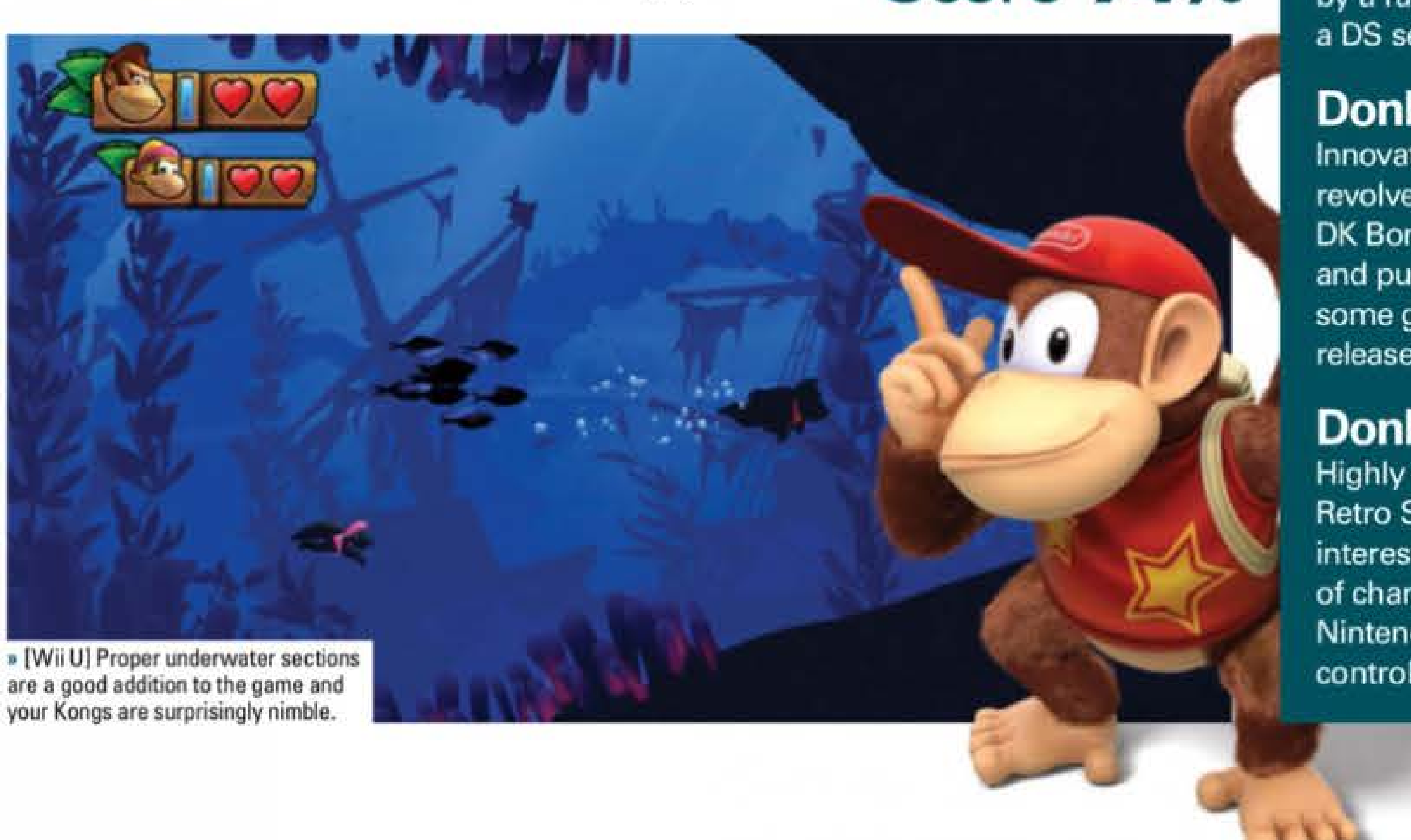
Tropical Freeze is everything you'd expect from a Nintendo platformer, but you can't help but feel that it could have been a lot more. The occasional forced perspective levels that crop up cynically suggest that it's not going to be too long before we see a 3DS update, while the new gameplay mechanics don't add a great deal to the core – admittedly enjoyable – gameplay. *Tropical Freeze* certainly entertains, but playing it can be a bittersweet experience.



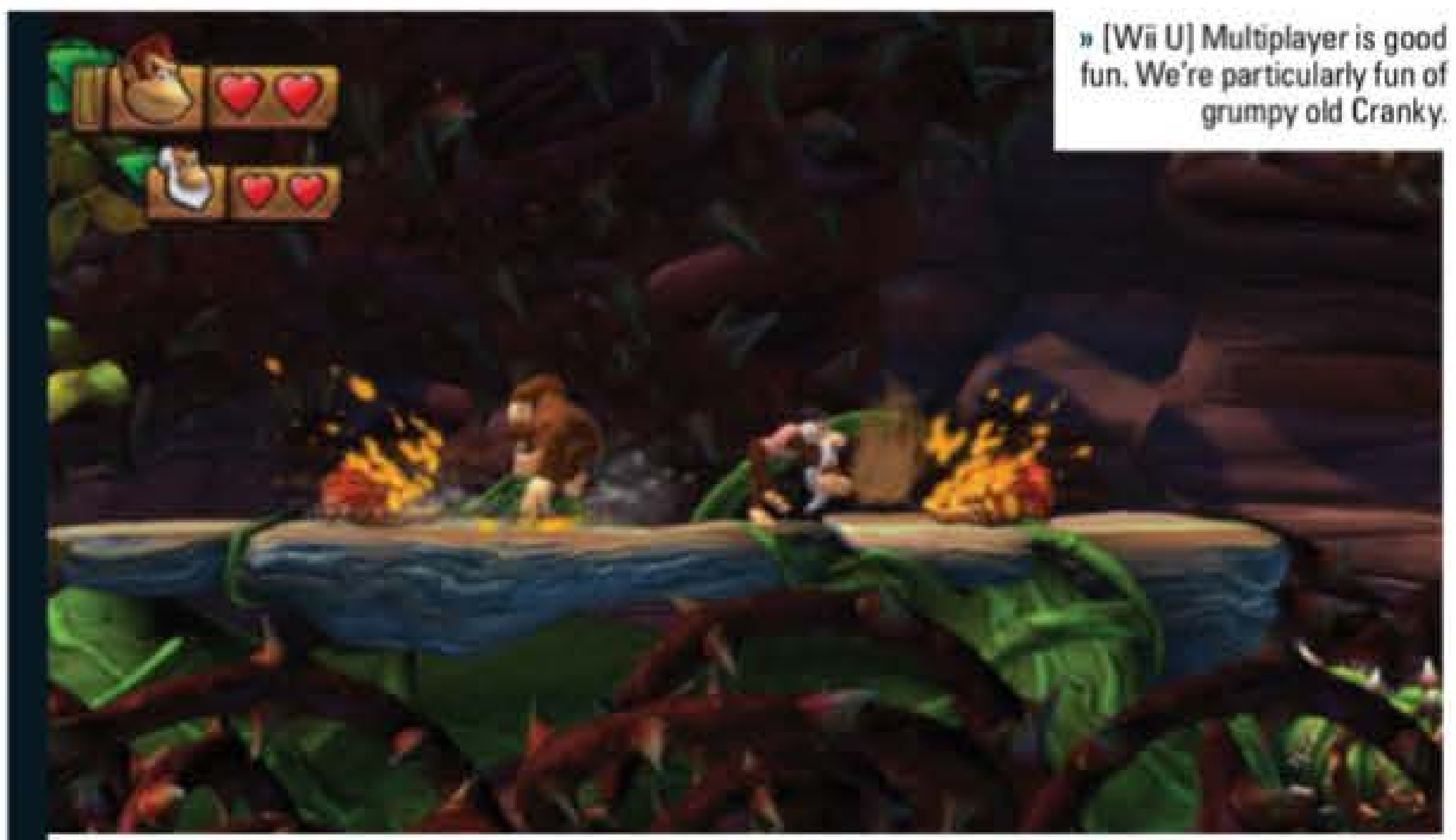
In a nutshell

It looks superb, but there's a genuine lack of innovation going on here, while the difficulty often feels a notch too high. *Tropical Freeze* is certainly a solid platformer, but it's nowhere near the creativity or imagination of *Super Mario 3D World*.

>> Score **74%**



» [Wii U] Proper underwater sections are a good addition to the game and your Kongs are surprisingly nimble.



» [Wii U] Multiplayer is good fun. We're particularly fun of grumpy old Cranky.

★WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
SUPER MARIO BROS (NINTENDO)



▼ SOMETHING NEW
SUPER MARIO 3D WORLD (WII U)



Other Donkey Kong games to play

Donkey Kong



This is where it all started for Nintendo's simian star and it remains addictive stuff. Guide Mario (or Jumpman, as he was then known) through four clever stages by jumping barrels, grabbing hammers and defeating that damn dirty ape.

Donkey Kong Country



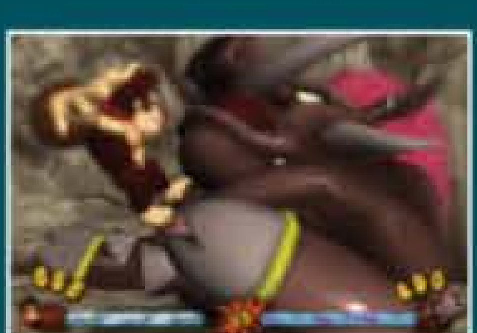
Created by Rare, Donkey Kong's first 16-bit adventure not only proved to be a great showcase for pre-rendered graphics, but also introduced the world to Diddy Kong. Highly popular, it went on to receive two additional SNES sequels.

DK: King Of Swing



An interesting variation on *Clu Clu Land*, with Donkey Kong swinging around on pegs in a quest to retrieve bananas and medals. It's a fun game, suitably bolstered by a range of gameplay modes, it received a DS sequel in 2007.

Donkey Kong Jungle Beat



Innovative platformer for the GameCube that revolves around the use of Donkey Konga's DK Bongos. Donkey Kong must kick, jump and punch his way to success as he battles some gigantic jungle bosses. It was re-released sans-bongos on the Wii in 2008.

Donkey Kong Country Returns

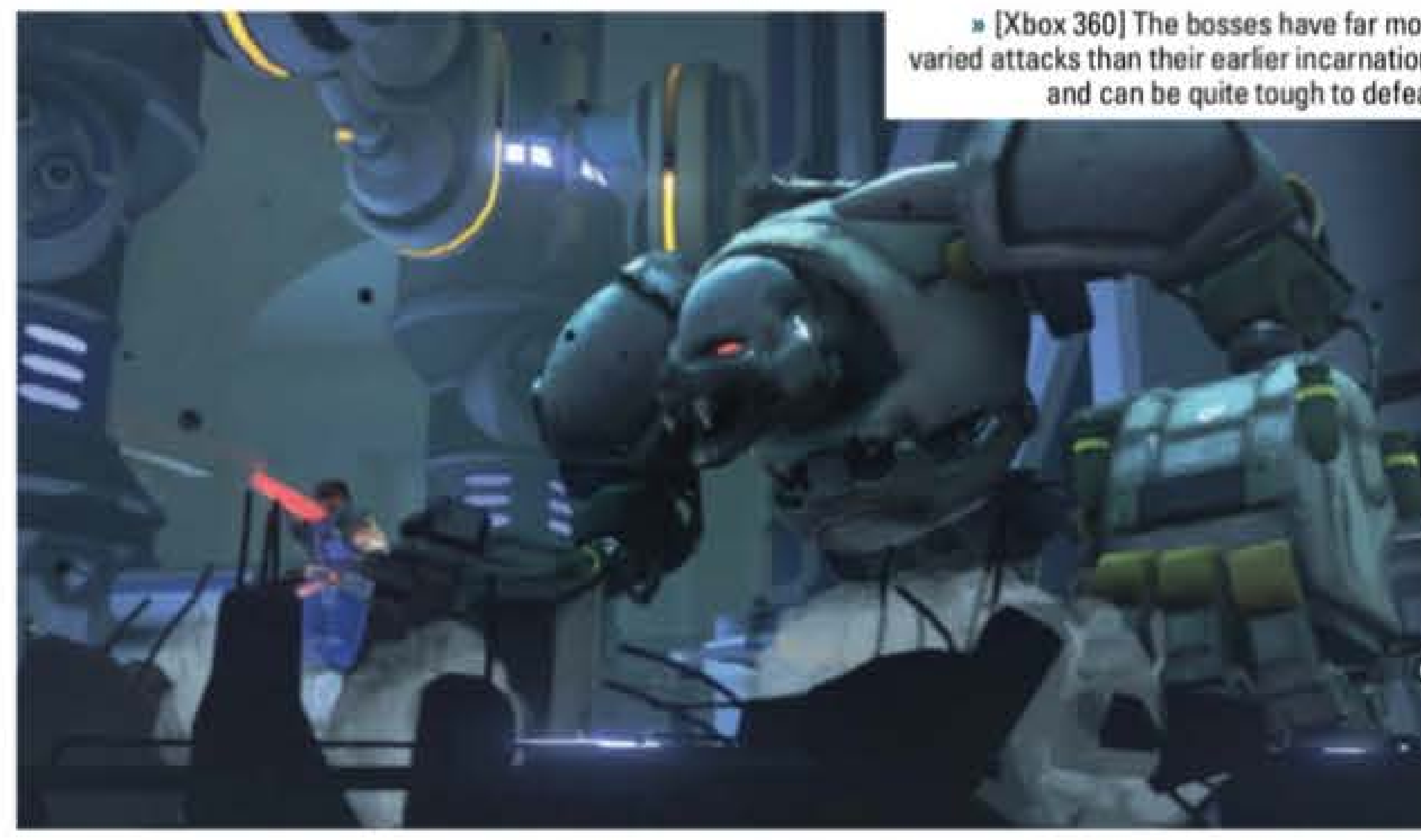


Highly entertaining platformer from Retro Studios that offers a stiff challenge, interesting level design and plenty of character. It's slightly let down by Nintendo's insistence on using motion controls, making it too tricky in places.

RETROROUND-UP

>> Every month we look at all the classics and latest releases that are available to buy or download

DOWNLOAD OF THE MONTH



» [Xbox 360] The bosses have far more varied attacks than their earlier incarnations and can be quite tough to defeat.

Strider

INFORMATION

» **System:** Xbox 360 (featured), Xbox One, PS3, PS4, Steam » **Buy it for:** £11.99
» **Buy it from:** XBLA, PSN, Steam

From the moment he arrives on screen and slices through his first enemy it becomes immediately obvious that this is a *Strider* game. Granted it's a *Strider* game that strays away from his adventures of old, but it still feels right.

This is mainly because of Strider Hiryu himself. Just like his 1989 incarnation he's amazingly athletic, more so in fact, having picked up a few new tricks since his debut some 25 years ago. He can still climb or hang from walls with ease, while he moves with all the deadly grace of his *Strider 2* incarnation. Double jumps, that deadly slide and wall jumps all combine to create a deadly one-man army, while Double Helix Games has added plenty of new tricks to Hiryu's armoury.

The most obvious is his versatile and adaptable Cypher sword that can be changed with a flick of the D-pad to offer different bonuses, from freezing effects to the ability to eventually repel incoming fire. Upgrades are liberally sprinkled throughout the large location of Kazach, which will slowly allow Hiryu to eventually access more areas of the huge sprawling city. It works surprisingly well, mainly because these areas are highly populated, allowing Strider to effortlessly showcase his newfound skills. Double Helix Games has nailed the sheer thrill of tearing through enemies that the original games succeeded so well at, making you really feel that you're in charge of a one-man army.



» [Xbox 360] You'll need the correct colour Cypher to break the shields of certain enemies.

It's particularly noticeable when you face off against *Strider*'s numerous bosses. Many favourites such as Solo and Emperor Dragon return, but now they have far more challenging attack patterns, some of which can be initially frustrating to solve. In true Capcom style you'll typically face certain mayors for a second time, and each new encounter features brand new patterns to learn. It's not always clear though when you're actually damaging enemies, and there are a few too many encounters against weedy human-sized opponents for our liking, but for the most part the boss battles are always enjoyable.

Interestingly, the weakest parts of *Strider* are when Double Helix tries to dumb the game down from its clever exploration to the arcade nature of *Strider 1* and *2*. There are certain sections, including the final assault on Meio's tower, which are incredibly frustrating, requiring constant Cypher switches that feel far too clunky and overly tough checkpoints. They're admittedly few and far between, but are incredibly irksome all the same. The character design is also incredibly bland, lacking the sheer imagination of the two arcade games.



» [Xbox 360] In addition to the main game there are bonus challenges in *Strider*.

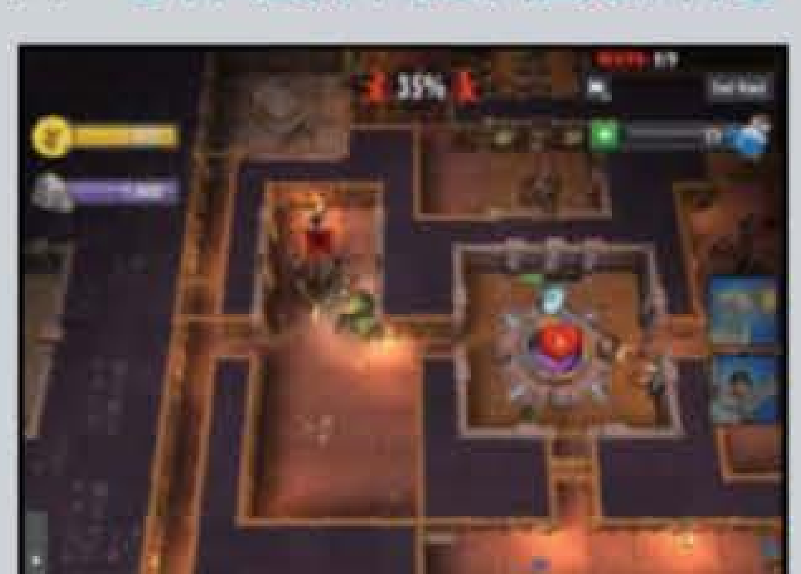


» [Xbox 360] As the game continues, *Strider* gets access to more and more useful abilities.

Strider certainly isn't perfect, but it manages to walk the line that will ensure it appeals to both fans and contemporary gamers. An impressive achievement.

76%

>> OTHER HIGHLIGHTS



Dungeon Keeper

» **System:** iOS (tested), Android
» **Buy it for:** Free (IAP)
» **Buy it from:** App Store, Google Play
» *Dungeon Keeper* is not a bad game. There we've said it. We played it for many hours and thoroughly enjoyed it, as it captures the fun of the original game, while adding more modern challenge elements. Sadly, the true purpose of *Dungeon Keeper* is revealed once you realise that you can't make any further progress without wasting days of real time or paying large amounts of cash. It's enough to test the patience of the most ardent *Dungeon Keeper* fan.

36%



Shufflepuck Cantina Deluxe

» **System:** PC (tested) iOS, Android
» **Buy it for:** £6.99
» **Buy it from:** Steam
» First released on iOS, *Shufflepuck* now heads to Steam and it's a good conversion. The controls themselves are fine, allowing you to pull off a solid number of shots. Unfortunately, the difficulty is a little wobbly, particularly on the 'Survival' rounds, while the game itself is a long grindfest, requiring large number of matches to make any actual progress. Add in annoying, overly-long defeat animations for opponents and *Shufflepuck* gets a little tired.

62%



Gunslugs

» **System:** iOS (tested), Android
» **Buy it for:** £1.49
» **Buy it from:** App Store, Google Play
» Fans of run-and-guns should immediately check out this entertaining blaster from OrangePixel. While it clearly takes its inspiration from *Metal Slug*, this delightful shooter mimics a number of classics from *Donkey Kong* to *Contra*, and throws in pop culture references as well. It's all wrapped up in some fast-paced action that plays out across five procedurally generated worlds, delivering tight controls and a large number of different weapons.

72%



Tomb Raider: Definitive Edition

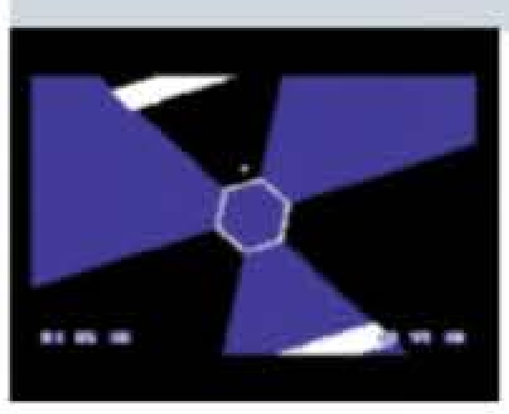
» **System:** PS4 (tested), Xbox One
» **Buy it for:** £49.99
» **Buy it from:** PSN, Xbox Live, Online, Retail
» There's no denying that Lara's reboot remains enjoyable, even a second time around. It's obvious though that this feels a little too weak for the asking price. While Lara, lighting and the environments have been remodelled, you wouldn't think it without double-checking the original, while the meagre selection of additional tombs and multiplayer maps adds very little. An expensive update that's offers little new to those who've already played it.

70%

>> The scene's latest news and reviews



I've just been wondering how viable a conversion of the XBLIG title Abduction Action Plus would be to a classic machine. The 8-bits would probably need a pared-down design but it might be possible to stay reasonably faithful with a 16-bit system… Anyway, just thought I'd mention it in passing, and this isn't an insidious attempt to subliminally influence any developers who might be reading…



FORMAT: COMMODORE 64
DEVELOPER: VARIOUS
LINK: KIKSTART.EU/RGCD-2013
RELEASE: 2013
PRICE: FREE

RGCD 16K CARTRIDGE COMPETITION

YOU NEED MORE THAN THAT FOR A LETTER

2013 saw the third instalment of the RGCD 16K Cartridge Competition for the C64 which, as the name suggests, is for games that have been crammed into 16K or less of memory. This year there were 15 entries covering a wide range of genres.

For players wanting an immediate hit of action there's Max Hall's solid and faithful conversion of Imagic's *Cosmic Ark* from the Atari 2600 where the titular ark and its lander must travel between worlds to pick up specimens. Or the very playable *Rocket Smash* by John Christian Lønningdal, a reworking of *Jetpac* where a spaceman defends himself from aliens as he assembles and fuels a rocket, before blasting off to the next level. And we can't forget Paul Koller's *Micro Hexagon*, a no-nonsense and technically jaw-dropping demake of *Super Hexagon* where the player-controlled square must avoid contact with the incoming walls as the entire play area rotates.



» [C64] That isn't a knife!

Kajtár Zsolt's conversion of multi-directional blaster *Kobo* has some large, space-bound structures on each stage which need destroying piece by piece to reach their core while *Devil Ronin* by Georg Rottensteiner – which is a conversion of a C64-themed Windows game from 2008 – offers a blend of gallery shooting and some sword-wielding platform action set in feudal Japan. Matthias Bock's *Powerglove* and Geir Straume's *Bellringer III* are both platform-oriented as well, with the former being all about adrenaline-fuelled run-and-gun gameplay where the ultimate aim is to restore essential power to the masses and the latter telling a Quasimodo-inspired tale of daring do, collecting gold coins and defeating evil knights with each level rounded off by a puzzle.

Puzzle fanatics shouldn't feel left out either, since there's also a reasonable if slow-paced *Tetris* clone called *S-Blox* from Payton Byrd, p1x3l.net's great implementation of *Puzzle Bobble* called *MonsterBuster* with its cutesy graphics and *Invert* by Richard Bayliss, an action-oriented challenge where the player-controlled blob must toggle the state of the playfield's tiles while avoiding bombs lobbed from the edges. There are a couple of two-player titles as well; Jörn Ruchmann's *Magic Duel* pits two wizards against each other in mortal combat over a range of hostile environments while *Linus Vs Simon* is a computerised rendition of the traditional pen-and-paper game *Squares* which developer Simon Quernhorst wrote as a present for his son's sixth birthday.



» [C64] This rocket sponsored by…

The weakest titles are probably *Revenge Of The Tomato* – a scrolling shooter again by Richard Bayliss with irritating collision detection and a frustrating wait between shots – and Dirk Schmitt's simple *Candle Burner* where players must light all of the candles on a Christmas tree in the shortest possible time; they're both quite playable but stand out as weak among their fellow entries. If we were to pick a top three we'd lean towards *Rocket Smash*, *MonsterBuster* and *Micro Hexagon*, however all of the other games are worth playing as well.

91%

"We can't forget Paul Koller's Micro Hexagon, a technically jaw-dropping demake of Super Hexagon"



» [C64] They look surprisingly happy.



» [C64] They're altogether ooky.



» [C64] Bombs away.

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at:
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

DOOM

» **FORMAT:** EXPANDED VIC-20 » **DEVELOPER:** STEVE MCCREA » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/DOOM-VIC » **PRICE:** FREE

All hell has broken loose on a Martian colony and a group of rugged space marines have been wiped out apart from one, whose mission is now to make his way through the research facility one area at a time while taking down the invading forces with just his wits and whatever weapons are available to him. Fortunately, there are the reanimated corpses of his former teammates who'll drop their guns when disposed of and supplies of ammo, armour and health packs lying around the place to collect.

The seminal first-person shooter has been put on something of a diet in order to slim it down for conversion to the VIC-20, and the low-resolution play area means that it's often fairly difficult to make out what's going on, but almost all of the important elements are present and this is still a solid spot of blasting that is worth running on a real VIC-20 for those lucky enough to have the required RAM.

84%



» [VIC 20] Can I see some ID?



» [VIC 20] We're doomed!

CGE ADVENTURES

» **FORMAT:** ATARI 2600 » **DEVELOPER:** RETRO GAMING ROUNDUP » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/CGE-2600 » **PRICE:** $10 (DOWNLOAD) OR $39 (CARTRIDGE)



» [Atari 2600] Sorry, I'm just stunned.

***CGE Adventures* has** the unusual claim of being based on actual events, which occurred at the 2010 Classic Gaming Expo in Las Vegas. A thief, who it later transpired was deaf, stole a spindle containing 100 audio CDs from the stand belonging to the Retro Gaming Roundup podcast team. The story has since become the stuff of legend and, thanks to a group of developers at Atari Age, is now immortalised in silicon.

The player takes control of the thief and in order to re-enact history there are a few items to collect first, including a VIP pass for the event, a Nintendo Zapper which can be used to stun disgruntled podcasters and a hearing aid. Carrying out the thief's daring plan is challenging even when armed since the various CGE attendees and custodial staff move quickly, but *CGE Adventures* is smooth, colourful and should appeal to Atari 2600 fans and in particular those who enjoy playing *Adventure*.

88%

MOUNTAIN PANIC

» **FORMAT:** BBC MICRO » **DEVELOPER:** RETRO SOFTWARE » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/PANIC-BBC » **PRICE:** £4.95 (CASSETTE) OR £6.95 (DISK) PLUS P&P

Antarctic expeditions are always unpredictable, but one of three archaeologists about to dig up an undiscovered area finds less than he bargained for when waking alone in the tent with just a scrap of paper where his colleagues were the night before. So now the poor man must brave the snow-covered wastes, the caverns below them and the less-than-friendly local fauna in a bid to solve the mystery and discover what has become of the members of his party.

Mountain Panic is a flick-screen platformer but one where the player's character Bill can't jump; instead a rope can be collected from one of the early screens which can be thrown at diagonals and, if it latches onto something, can be climbed. This and the random movement of some enemies does make the game very challenging and delving deeper into the disappearance of those explorers will take practice and patience.

82%



» [BBC] Swinging the chain.

WHAT'S BREWING?

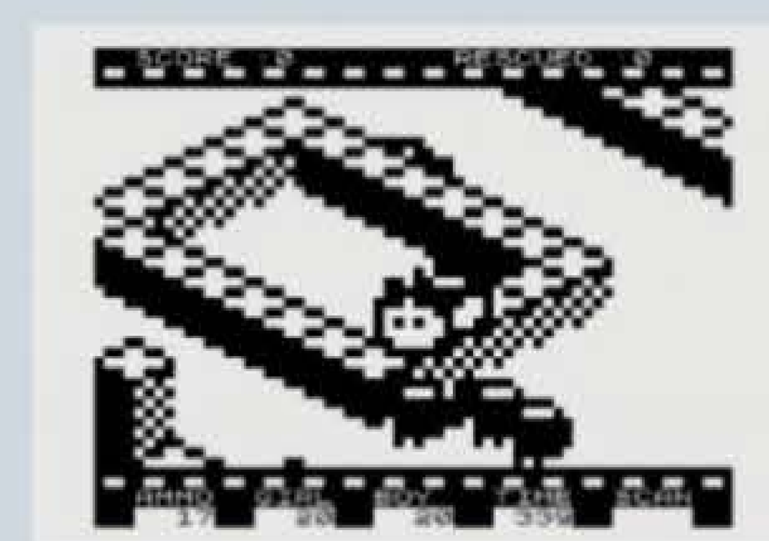
All the latest news from the homebrew community



» [Plus/4] *Android 2* running on a Plus/4!

» We are the robots

Vortex Software's *Android 2* was released in the early Eighties, and this new Plus/4 port was built from Ocean's C64 conversion. There are three sprawling mazes that are teeming with other robots, but the titular tin can has been given the task of destroying a quota of caterpillar-like machines which take a couple of hits to eradicate. kikstart.eu/android-264 knows where to look for robots.



» [Plus/4] Why did the frog cross the road?

» Ants in their pants

Continuing the theme of porting games, we have *Ant Attack* for the ZX81, which was developed by the prolific Bob Smith with Sandy White's approval. The graphics are chunkier than the original, but we've given it a quick play and were very impressed at how much is crammed into the Spectrum's older brother. *Ant Attack* is available from Bob's website, which is hiding from giant ants behind Kikstart.eu/ant-attack-zx81



» [PET] Up a certain creek.

» Paddles in spaaace!

Paddle Shooter is a two-player shootout game that was recently released on the PET. The game was written to utilise an interface designed by the programmer for connecting paddles, but will also work with the keyboard for emulator users or PET owners who don't fancy building their own hardware. kikstart.eu/paddle-shooter-pet connects to a YouTube video that has playing instructions and a download link in the description.

HOMEBREW

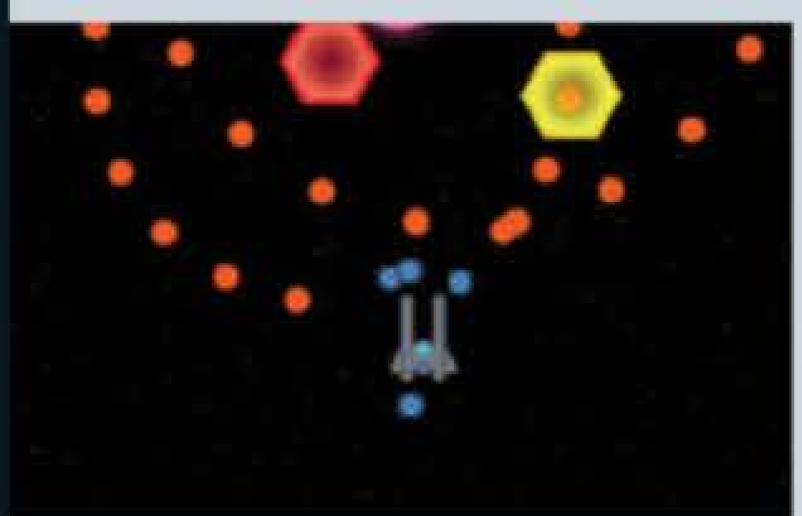
>> The scene's latest news and reviews

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community

>> IT'S COMING UP, IT'S COMING UP

We've mentioned the Ludum Dare events in the past; they're game creation competitions that take place over a couple of days with the organisers only announcing the theme for each competition near to the start and leaving the developers to interpret that theme in any way they see fit. The 28th instalment finished recently and had a theme of 'you only get one', which in turn led to over 2,000 games being released! The top 100 in order are behind kikstart.eu/ludum-dare-28 and there's a link to the rest.



>> LAYING EGGS

There are some games that are based on the most mundane aspects of life. For example, *Chicken Origami Invaders* is a game about a cat riding on the back of a giant chicken while shooting origami enemies. How often have we all been through that experience, eh? For those who haven't recently, it might be worth heading to kikstart.eu/origami-xblig.



FLASH BOREDOM

Want to know how to while away those boring office hours? Then don't miss out on **Retro Gamer**'s Flash game of the month. This month we take a look at **Only One Chance.**

DO ROBOTS FALL IN LOVE? ACCORDING TO THIS RATHER WHIMSICAL PLATFORM GAME THEY DO, AS THE PLAYER LEADS A DROID AROUND IN SEARCH OF THE GIRL BOT OF HIS DREAMS. AFTER HE DOES, THE TWO OF THEM CAN CONTINUE THROUGH THE LEVELS AS THE BOY STOMPS ON CANNONS TO IMPRESS HER. KIKSTART.EU/ONE-CHANCE-FLASH

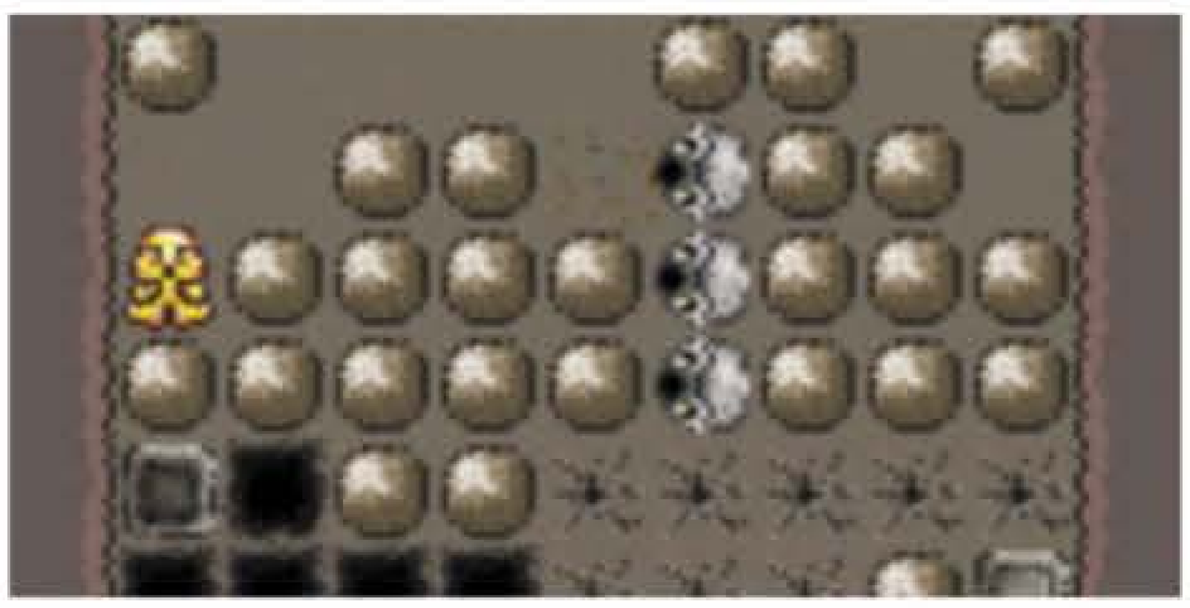
MORE GAMES WE'VE BEEN PLAYING...

PUSH

» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/PUSH-WIN



***Push* is a** puzzle game for Windows where a little explorer has to push objects around to get to the golden idol he covets, only to see it plummet through a trapdoor to the next stage. And getting to the treasure is a lot more problematic than it sounds, since the explorer can only push one object on each stage and there are spear-launching traps and collapsing floors to worry about too, some of which might prove helpful. This means that what would otherwise be a nicely presented but fairly unremarkable *Sokoban*-style puzzle game is actually more fiendish and challenging, with some of the screens requiring quite a bit of thought before even moving from the starting spot. More cerebral gamers should take a look.





DONALD DOWELL AND THE GHOST OF BARKER MANOR

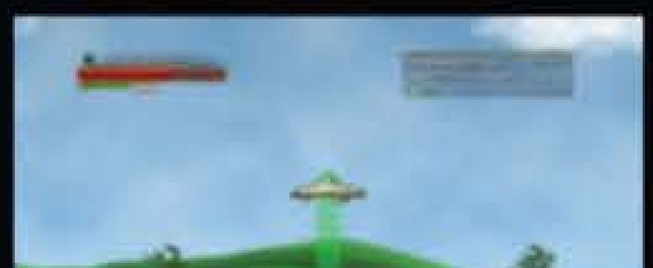
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/DOWELL-WIN

Donald Dowell is a sweet, retired Post Office worker whose life is quiet and relaxed, or would be if it weren't for his battle-axe of a wife. All the same, he's bored senseless and the obvious cure is to get a new job, but who'd take an 80-year-old on these days?

The answer could be vampire hunter and paranormal investigator Bob Delano, but even after Donald convinces Delano's secretary that he'd be perfect for the job, there's still the small matter of Delano himself being MIA at the ominous-looking Barker Manor. Assisted by the player through a beautifully drawn point-and-click user interface, can Donald get to the Manor, find his would-be boss and save the day?

ABDUCTION ACTION PLUS

» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/ABDUCTION-XBLIG





The aliens are here and you're one of them! You might be a particularly poor example of extraterrestrial life, but because your sister has married into the military you're now sat at the controls of a genuine flying saucer and sent out to 'tease' the people of the planet Earth. Many of these Earthlings are docile – as are their livestock – so flying your saucer over and beaming them up is easy, but the more hostile elements open fire given even the slightest provocation and are best dealt with by taking them up into the stratosphere and turning the beam off, or just by dropping something heavy on them.

The close encounters start with dodging or splattering farmers and purloining their cows but things soon escalate, with the final mission being a heavily-armed military base that looks suspiciously like Area 51 where some of your brothers and their craft are being held. There are only five stages including the tutorial that have a handful of missions each, so the game could have been longer, but for not many more pennies than a packet of crisps you'll get to smash tanks with rocks and drop clusters of coppers from a very great height.



HOMEBREW HEROES

WE'VE RECENTLY LOOKED AT THE RASPBERRY PI-POWERED FUZE, A COMPUTER INSPIRED BY THE MACHINES OF THE 8- AND 16-BIT ERA. JON SILVERA IS THE MAN WHO PULLED THE PROJECT TOGETHER, SO WE WANTED TO FIND OUT MORE



Q&A

Where did the original idea for the FUZE originate?

The idea for the FUZE started when my son David and my two young girls Molly and Gracie displayed an interest in a BBC Model B I'd set up in my study. Before I knew it they had me, and soon them, programming a few lines of code to show how it worked and what it could do. David and I spent the afternoon writing a detective text adventure – he was hooked. The girls, who are much younger, were glued to the Tea Shop game. We have Nintendo, Xbox and plenty more to play with and yet they were more enthralled by the 8-bit wonderment than they were with anything cutting-edge.

I couldn't get this out of my thoughts; what if we could make a modern-day BASIC computer in the mould of the computers of the Eighties? Would it appeal and could it help to get kids interested in programming again? I searched for a BASIC language-based system and came across the Maximite from the rather talented über techie, Geoff Graham from Australia. The chap is a true genius. So I ordered one and a few days and a few sheets of foam board later I had a working mock-up unit made. I was in love again and convinced there was an opportunity to expand our business from software to hardware also.

And why was the Raspberry Pi chosen?

Well, if it hadn't had been for another techie guru in the form of Gordon Henderson then it may well have never been the Raspberry Pi. Gordon had been working away on RTB (Return To BASIC) that has since evolved with substantial improvements and enhancements into FUZE BASIC.

BASIC is where a huge number of now-successful individuals cut their teeth. Those early years in the late Seventies and Eighties are responsible for establishing so much of, or at the very least influencing many facets of, the IT industry as it stands today. Bedroom coders, early hackers and computer junkies went on to create great things that we now rely upon.

What are people doing with the FUZE and what would you like to see them doing?

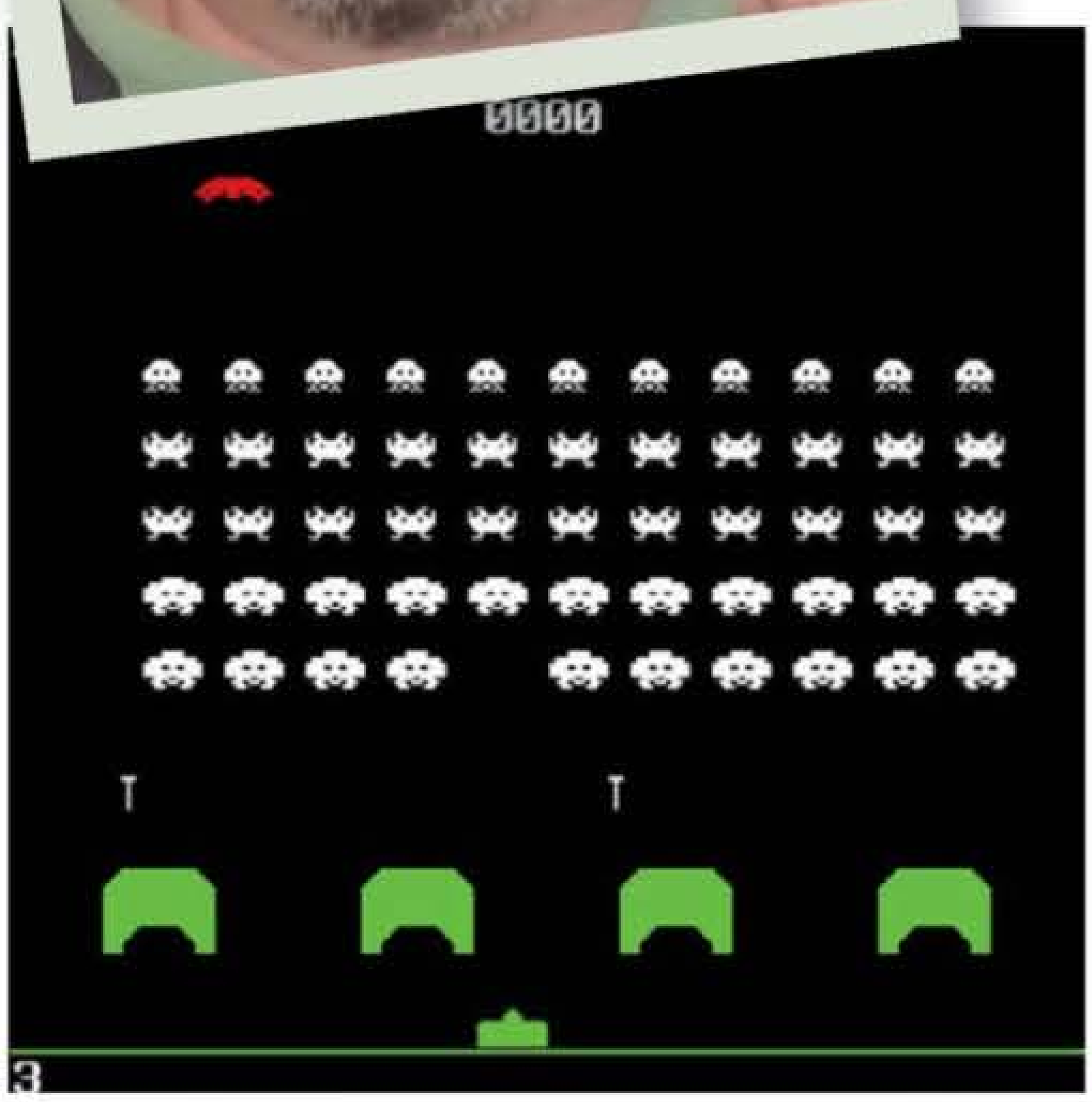
Tinkering, showing off, learning, playing, enjoying, blowing things up, controlling stuff, more showing off and even more learning stuff – that is what we/they are doing now and I hope will continue to do.

And finally, where can our readers get more information about the FUZE?

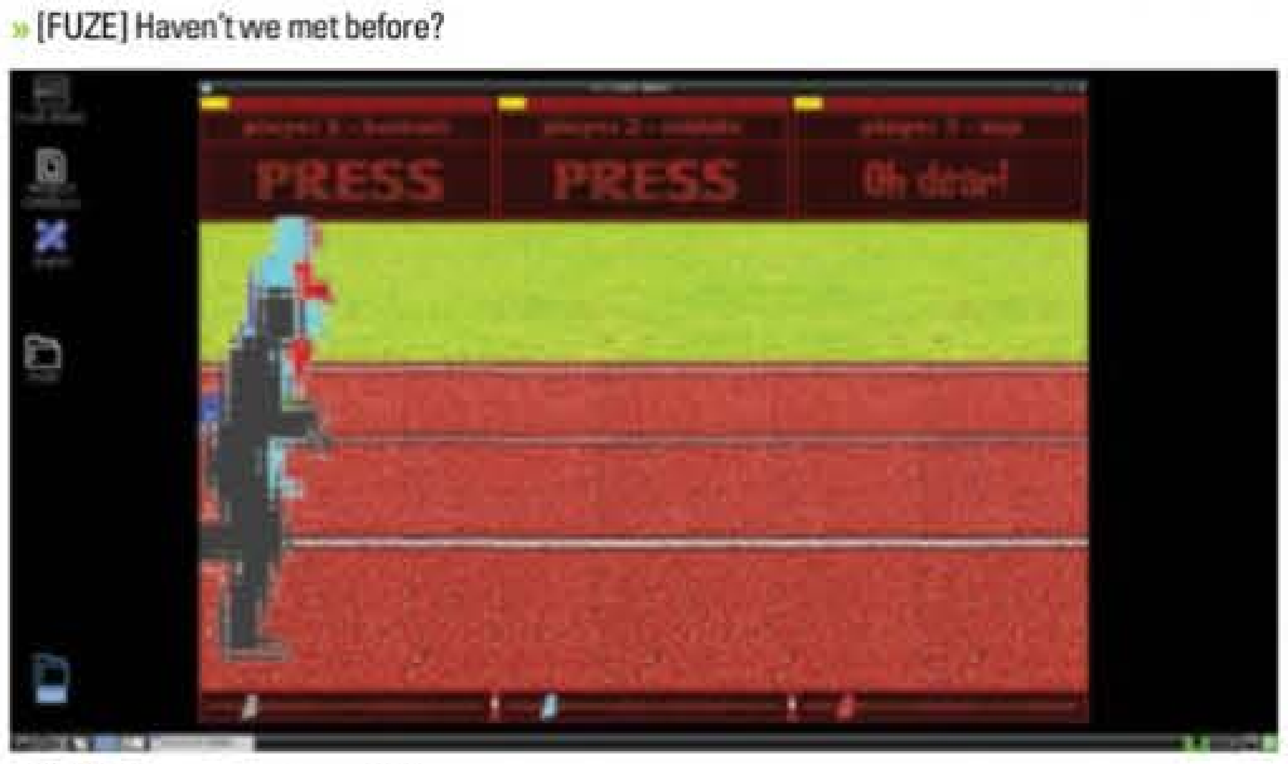
FUZE.co.uk – However, please bear with us, as so often it is the case when things are running away somewhat, we are struggling to update it as often as we need to… any volunteers? (Seriously!)

A last word, **RG**; please keep up the awesome work and the same goes out to the Homebrew Heroes out there, superstars every one.

> **"I thought, what if we could make a modern-day BASIC computer in the mould of the computers from the Eighties?"**
> Jon Silvera



» [FUZE] Haven't we met before?



» [FUZE] On your marks… GO!



» [FUZE] Everyone is talking about me.



» [FUZE] Under *Reaction Racer*'s hood.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

WIN!

This month's Star Letter prize is a cool Game Gadget, courtesy of **www.funstock.co.uk**



STAR LETTER

TOEJAM & EARL 4: CROCHET CAPERS

Dear **RG,**

Having never put pen to paper to write to a magazine before I thought it was high time I started to heap some long overdue praise on my favourite magazine.

I've been enjoying watching the mag evolve from issue 2 right up to the astounding recent issues some ten years later. I was convinced it would be a short-lived hobbyist title, but the magazine's longevity and standard of articles never ceases to amaze me. It is funny to think that all those ghastly modern games I was fed up with when I first caught sight of your mag are now every bit as retro as the Spectrum and Mega Drive games I get that dewy-eyed nostalgia thing for.



» This is quite possibly the most adorable thing that we've ever seen. Now where's his partner Earl Davey?

Anyway the main reason for writing is that my wife has recently taken up crocheting and I wanted to show off this amazing ToeJam toy she made for me, and I thought what better place to display her handiwork than on the hallowed pages of **Retro Gamer**.

She's got the bug now and she's already in the planning stages for a Chuck D Head, and of course making ToeJam's buddy Earl. Though there's such a long list of ace Mega Drive characters she might wish she never started!

Keep up the great work guys, here's to the next ten years!

All the best,
Davey Sloan

Many thanks for the kind words about the magazine. It's certainly interesting to look back over the decade since Retro Gamer launched – gaming has changed a lot, given that our first issue could be found sharing shelf space with a magazine for the original PlayStation! Download services have made older games much easier to obtain, while Kickstarter has allowed fan-driven revivals of games like Elite.

As for ToeJam, we're massively impressed – congratulations to your wife on her great work! We particularly like the little details, like the inclusion of lettering on ToeJam's medallion and the laces on his shoes. We couldn't help but make this our Star Letter for the issue, so enjoy your prize!

IMPORT DREAMS

Dear **Retro Gamer,**

Great feature on *MSR* – brought back loads of memories. I remember exploiting the Kudos system by doing doughnuts at the start of a race, which was essential for unlocking some of the later challenges as there was a huge difficulty spike later in the game. Special mention to Richard Jacques' soundtrack as well, which still sounds great today.

I also couldn't help but notice your picture on page 28 paired a European Dreamcast (blue swirl) with a Japanese controller (orange swirl)! I had a Japanese system myself but was able to play UK games using a free Action Replay disc that was given away as a covermount with Dreamcast magazine *DC:UK*. Conveniently (and apparently unbeknownst to the mag) booting up the disc before putting in a game totally bypassed all regional lock-out! If I recall correctly the issue in question flew off the shelves once word got out! Good times!
Tim Fitches

We're glad you enjoyed the feature! Cover disc gaffes can be excellent for magazine readers, and *DC:UK*'s Action Replay CDX demo was one of the best. Our personal favourite was from *Sega Pro*, which gave away a *Keio Flying Squadron* demo for the Mega-CD in 1994. It turned out that all of the stages had been included on the disc and were accessible via the same level select cheat as in the full game, making it one of the most unintentionally generous cover discs ever.



» The Dreamcast was Sega's last great console. What a pity it had to end…



RETRO GAMER VS THE WORLD

Dear **RG,**

I have subscribed to the mag for two years now, and like many retro gamers I read your issues alongside old classics from back in the day. One thing the old ones did well was their monthly trip to the arcades, reviewing games like *Pit Fighter*, *OutRun* and *Afterburner*. Alongside the great stuff you bring to us all monthly, it would be fantastic to have something like this brought back to life.

Some magazines used to have reader versus writer tournaments too, on anything from *Street Fighter II* to *Operation Wolf*. I'd be happy to step in if you had a *Street Fighter II* tournament. I still roll out a mean Guile.

All the best,
Neil Upton

Hi Neil, thanks for the letter. We love the arcades and will always cover new games with retro connections, but a monthly trip isn't something we could do – even if we were covering brand new titles as well, manufacturers aren't making games at that kind of rate. However, you'll be pleased to know that we'll be covering arcade games in a big way next issue.

As for tournaments, we used to have the Beat The Team section here in Mailbag, but that's been gone for a while. It's an interesting idea though – are other readers interested in challenging the Retro Gamer team?

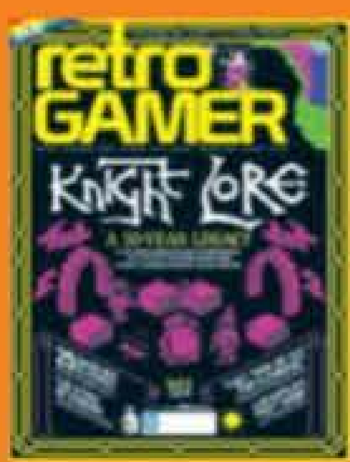
REACH FOR THE STAR (FORCE)

Dear **Retro Gamer,**

When I was a boy I used to go to Pontins

Don't forget to follow us online for all the latest retro updates

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag



CONTACT US

Snail Mail: Retro Gamer, Imagine Publishing, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ

Email: retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

» [Mega-CD] You weren't supposed to see this on the demo, but JVC accidentally gave away the whole of *Keio Flying Squadron*.



» [Arcade] Neil Upton wants to bring the fight to **Retro Gamer**. Do we have any other takers?

Dolphin with my grandparents (and parents…) and in the old arcade there used to be a game I would waste 20p a shot on, every night! I loved it. The guy who ran the arcade used to switch it on for me in the morning and allow me five free credits. Eventually the Dolphin burnt down with the arcade game with it, sending it only to memory.

So when I caught the retro bug about ten years ago I searched the internet high and low, but nothing. Until I purchased this month's **Retro Gamer**, and there was a small image of a game ported to the SNES with two words on the screenshot, 'Alpha Stage'. My rather burnt out memory jolted – the game's stages were in phonetic code. So I did a search on YouTube and as soon as I found it and the jingle played, my 25-year search was over! I just finished downloading it on my Wii (the irony is that it was so close every day!).

Oh, the game's name? *Star Force*. It might not be the best shooter, but it swept me right back and to be honest I don't really have any more retro games to look for now!

Cheers,

Stuart Neale



It's great to hear that you've rediscovered *Star Force*!

There's nothing better than returning to a long-forgotten favourite, particularly a treasured memory from holidays. We possess fond memories of arcade games at holiday camps too – even if the weather turned on you, it was still possible to have some fun that you couldn't experience at home. You might not be looking for any more retro games right now, but we're going to tempt you a little by mentioning that there are also two sequels, *Super Star Force* and *Final Star Force*.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Strider

With the arrival of a new *Strider* game in the office and a *Strider* feature in the issue, there was never a chance that it would be anything else. The entire team has been shown the new art at Darran's desk, while Darran hunted down anyone who foolishly mentioned they never played the original.





» [Arcade] It's funny how tiny details can trigger memories – in Stuart Neale's case, it was stages named after Greek letters.



From the forum

» www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

Your Favourite isometric games

ArchaicKoala
The one, the only *Head Over Heels* on the Spectrum. Is there anything else to be said?

The Laird
Has to be *Escape From The Planet Of The Robot Monsters*.

Morkin
Knight Lore. Yes I know it's obvious, but when my friend at school lent it to me (and I asked if it was any good), I was gobsmacked when I first started playing it.

Lost Dragon
The Immortal, picked the game up on Mega Drive and fell in love with it. Tough, but rewarding game. Going through the spider's lair always stood out for me, plus the gore at the time was superb.

pantal00ns
Gunfright for me – not the impact title but just the Wild West setting and shooting mini-games sold it for me. Was never very good at it though.

Antiriad2097
The Great Escape. It was so flexible, letting you work out when, where and how to go about your plan, not being fixed to one solution. Letting the CPU take control of the mundane daily routine was a stroke of genius.

PaulEMoz
Much as I love the Ultimate games, my favourite isometric adventure ever is *Landstalker* on the Mega Drive.

NorthWay
Marble Madness. Honorable mention to *Crystal Castles*.

deadpan666
I have a soft spot for all *Jurassic Park* games, but nothing beats creating and managing your own dinosaur park in *Jurassic Park: Operation Genesis*.

necronom
UFO: Enemy Unknown, though another day I might say *Breach II*.

Hiro
I'll go with Utopia on the Amiga. Probably the only real-time strategy game that got me hooked.

RodimusPrime
Cobra Triangle on the NES. Played brilliantly, full of colour and imagination, and gave you a real desire to see what was going to happen on the next level. Brilliant stuff.

kelp7
I got a big kick out of playing Panther on my friend's C64 back in the day, super cool music and Zaxxon-like movement. Great blaster at a budget price.

retro GAMER

Imagine Publishing Ltd
Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill,
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+44 (0) 1202 586200
Web: www.imagine-publishing.co.uk
www.retrogamer.net
www.greatdigitalmags.com

Magazine team

Editor **Darran Jones**
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk
01202 586237
Editor in Chief **Nick Roberts**
Senior Designer **Jonathan Wells**
Staff Writer **Nick Thorpe**
Sub Editor **Steve Holmes**
Photographer **James Sheppard**
Senior Art Editor **Andy Downes**
Head of Publishing **Aaron Asadi**
Head of Design **Ross Andrews**

Contributors
Mike Bevan, Kerry Brunskill, Richard Burton, Kerry Brunskill, Martyn Carroll, David Crookes, Paul Davies, Paul Drury, Kieren Hawken, Jason Kelk, Graeme Mason, Rory Milne

Advertising
Digital or printed media packs are available on request
Advertising Director Matthew Balch
01202 586437
matthew.balch@imagine-publishing.co.uk
Head of Sales Hang Deretz
01202 586442
hang.deretz@imagine-publishing.co.uk
Account Manager Anthony Godsell
01202 586420
anthony.godsell@imagine-publishing.co.uk

International
Retro Gamer is available for licensing. Contact the International department to discuss partnership opportunities.
Head of International Licensing Cathy Blackman
+44 (0) 1202 586401
licensing@imagine-publishing.co.uk

Subscriptions
Head of Subscriptions Gill Lambert
gill.lambert@imagine-publishing.co.uk
For all subscription enquiries
email retrogamer@servicehelpline.co.uk
(UK) 0844 848 8412
(Overseas) +44 1795 592 872
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Circulation
Head of Circulation Darren Pearce
01202 586200

Production
Production Director Jane Hawkins
01202 586200

Founders
Group Managing Director Damian Butt
Group Finance & Commercial Director Steven Boyd

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retro GAMER

next month

>> LOAD 127

ON SALE 27 MARCH 2014

WHEN ARCADES RULED

Key developers explain how your local arcade was the epicentre of gaming innovation for three decades



Jack The Nipper
■ We chat to developer Greg Holmes about the birth of gaming's naughtiest toddler

Intellivision
■ As Mattel's console turns 35, we speak to the key developers involved in its success



Commander Keen
■ Tom Hall and John Romero discuss the creation of id Software's PC answer to Mario

PlayStation Gems
■ Readers reveal their favourite games on Sony's 32-bit console. How many of them did you play?

Also featured:
• ColecoVision • Rock N' Roll Racing • Ronald Wayne
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ENDGAME



RESIDENT EVIL GAIDEN

» When Capcom decided that Game Boy Color owners needed a good dose of terror, the result was 2001's Resident Evil Gaiden. After spending the game stuck on a boat and battling zombies, Barry Burton and Leon S Kennedy have defeated the shape-shifting bio-organic weapon and rescued Lucia, a girl targeted by Umbrella for carrying a parasite. All that's left to do is celebrate…



01

» As Barry descends the ladder onto the deck of the submarine, he shouts "I am *done* with this ship!" Leon shakes his head and sighs, as he hopes his next starring role won't feature a sidekick that likes wordplay.



02

» The boat also disapproves of Barry's tomfoolery, and sinks in protest. Barry can't understand why everyone is such a spoilsport. Between this and his "master of unlocking" line, he's seriously considering leaving the series for good.



03

» Lucia has also decided that she's definitely better off outside of this crazy series, and agrees to head back home with Barry. But before they go, the trio does at least try its hardest to wrap up the game's plot.



04

» Free of the parasite bio-organic weapon, Lucia's abnormal healing abilities and heightened sense of hearing have disappeared. Of course, so has her ability to sense Umbrella's monstrous creations, but this shouldn't prove to be too much of a problem, given that Leon and Barry killed them all. Right?



05

» But wait! Leon's got a cut, which is oozing what appears to be an energy drink. It's actually green blood, which is a signature of the bio-organic weapon. This Leon is a fake. We should have known all along – no real human could have resisted Barry's excellent pun.